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Guki the moon boy



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GUKI THE MOON BOY
and Other Plays



NOW, BOY, QUICK! WHAT SAYS THE HOURGLASS NOW?

GUKI THE MOON BOY

and Other Plays

by

BEULAH FOLMSBEE

with illustrations by

DECIE MERWIN



New York

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MEZZANINE

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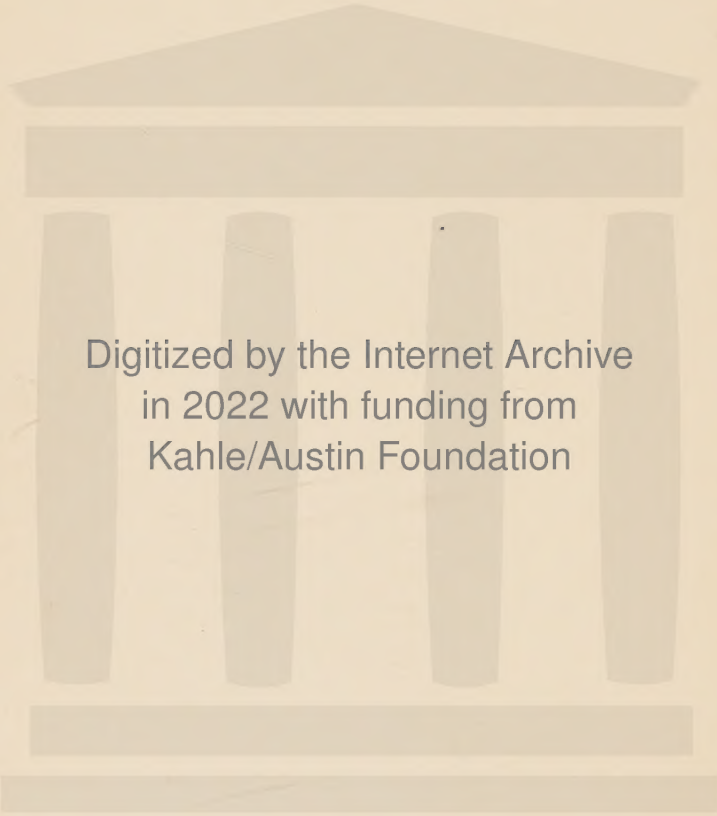


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TO THE DEAR MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER
and
TO MY FRIEND AND TEACHER
MAUD GATCHELL HICKS

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MAUD GATCHELL HICKS



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GUKI THE MOON BOY

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

ANTON ANTINOV, *an old astrologer.*

GUKI, called "*the Moon Boy.*"

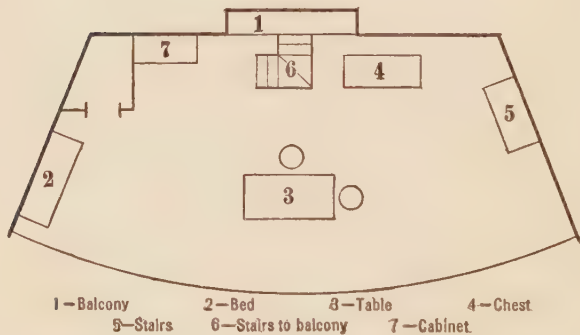
LEO NIKOLOV, *the landlord.*

VASKA NIKOLOV, *the landlord's wife.*

NIKOLAS
PETER
ALEXEY

} *roomers in LEO NIKOLOV's house.*

BEAM, *a little shadow from the moon.*



GUKI THE MOON BOY

ANTINOV's room in the attic of LEO NIKOLOV's house.

The room is unusually high and the back wall is jogged at center to form a recess into which is set a platform. Upon this platform, against the back wall, is an old cabinet with shelves containing bowls, jars, and dusty flasks filled with colored liquids. To the left of the cabinet, a winding stairway leads to the door opening upon a balcony where a telescope may be seen silhouetted against the sky. At the foot of the stairway, against the platform is an iron-bound chest. At the right of the jog is a door with arched top and deeply recessed framework. Steps lead down through this door connecting the attic with the lower floors of the house. Against the right wall is a low bed, and against the left wall, a stove. An icon hangs in the upper left corner. Down center stage is a long table upon which may be seen a large open book, charts and maps, quill pen, ink, sandbox, hourglass and unlighted candle. There is a chair back of the table and a stool at the left end of it. Other benches and stools.

The curtain rises on a dark, empty room. On the balcony may be seen the figure of an old man at his telescope, and a slim, barelegged boy sitting in the doorway. They are so still, the boy with head thrown back in wistful contemplation of the moon and the old man intent on his study at the telescope that they seem like a picture framed by the shadowy outline of the doorway.

THE OLD MAN (*Antinov*) [*making a record in a small pad hanging from a cord about his waist*]. Now, boy, quick! What says the hourglass now?

THE BOY (*Guki*) [*takes a lighted tin lantern from the balcony and runs down to the table*]. The hour is nearly gone. The sands are falling—falling—falling—until now—the hour—is—gone! The sands have fallen: the gold sands, like little stars, have fallen.

ANTINOV [*closes door and comes down to table*]. Yes, like stars. For the stars fall, we know not where; and now the sands in that little glass have fallen and an hour has slipped away into the night, we know not where—eh? [*Turns glass up.*]

GUKI. But not *quite* like stars. A star falls very swiftly. First you see it high up in the sky—high up. Then suddenly it falls, and before you can call some one, it has gone. But these sands—they fall slowly.

ANTINOV. Ah, but that's because you are young, very young. When you are old, like me, and so much of your work not yet done—then the sands will run fast—fast. [*Sighs and writes in large book.*]

GUKI. Tell me what you have written there?

ANTINOV. I have written here that at the hour of nine, the moon—there, read for yourself. It is only what I have written many times before.

GUKI. No. I can't read that. That's writing—such fine black writing. I can only read print.

ANTINOV. See now, that is what comes of not studying. When I was your age I had written whole books full of Latin.

GUKI. Oh, I know. The pupils in the school do that. Sometimes when I am taking my geese to the fields, I pass by the school house and I hear the pupils reciting together, "Qui, quae, quod"—that's what they say. And then my geese say, "Quack, quack, quack!" The master comes out to see what is the matter and when he sees me he says, "Oh, it's only that dunce, Guki," and the pupils call out, "Go away from here with your silly geese, Guki the Moon Boy."

ANTINOV. Moon Boy?

GUKI. Yes, Moon Boy. Guki the Moon Boy—that's what they call me.

ANTINOV. That is a very strange name for a gooseherd.

GUKI. Oh, they think to plague me because I talk to my

geese about the moon. I tell my geese many things about the moon.

ANTINOV. What things?

GUKI. No, I won't tell you. You'd laugh at me. The pupils laugh at me. They say I have no wits. And the master tells them they will be dunces, like me, if they do not study. [*Slyly.*] But they don't know. There are things



not written in books—things you can't learn. They *come* to you—when you are alone. Out in the fields, lying on your back, and looking straight up and up and up—everything so still—oh, I know things!

ANTINOV. Tell me. You lie on your back and you look up and up—and things come to you. What things? Why should I laugh? I won't laugh.

GUKI. That's because you don't know. But if I told you, you'd laugh—like the others. Oh, you are an old man, and very wise, they say. The master at the school says you are very wise—but you would laugh at me, I know.

ANTINOV. But suppose I didn't laugh. Suppose I believed what you told me?

GUKI. Then *they* would think you had grown foolish, but I would think you were very, very wise.

ANTINOV. You are a strange boy. You are not like these Russian boys. Where did you come from?

GUKI. I don't know.

ANTINOV. What? You say you don't know where you came from?

GUKI. No. I don't know where I came from. No one knows.

ANTINOV. But surely, some one must know. How did you come here, to this place?

GUKI. Oh, I don't belong here, in this place—shhhh!
[*Goes to door and listens.*]

ANTINOV. What's the matter? Why do you go to the door and listen?

GUKI. It's Vaska Nikolov, my mistress—I'm afraid she might hear what I say to you. Once she heard me tell this to Alexey the jeweler who lives here, and she beat me. She says people will not rent rooms here if I tell such things. [*He peeks cautiously out of the door, and then closes and locks it.*]

ANTINOV. Well, now you have locked the door. No one can come in or hear what you say. So now you can tell me.

GUKI. Yes, now I will tell you. [*He sits on stool at left*

of table and leaning over it speaks in lowered voice and with mysterious manner.] Some one lost me—when I was very small—not so high. And Vaska Nikolov found me and brought me here.

ANTINOV. So! That was very kind of Vaska Nikolov.

GUKI. No, no! She beats me. She is not kind to me.

ANTINOV. Then why does she keep you here? Suppose she didn't keep you. You would have no home.

GUKI. She keeps me here to tend the geese. I heard her tell Leo Nikolov—you know Leo Nikolov, the fat man—he is her husband. Once I heard them talking about me. He said, Leo Nikolov said, "Why did you bring him home? Another mouth to feed." And she said, "How did I know no one would come to claim him. I thought some one would come and offer much money because I had found him. Then we should have been rich. But bah! No one comes: so let him tend the geese for his food, the silly dunce!" So you see I don't belong here. Some one lost me. And I tend the geese for my keep. But sometimes, when I have been lying on my back to look up at the sky, it grows dark and the moon comes out before I start home. Then Vaska Nikolov beats me and says I have not even wits enough to tend the geese. [*Knocking on door.*] Hark! Is that my mistress? If she finds me here, she will beat me.

ANTINOV. Who is there?

VASKA NIKOLOV [*from without*]. What should that matter to you? Open the door!

GUKI. That is my mistress. She will surely beat me. She says I am not to come in here.

ANTINOV [*perplexed*]. But you never come in here. This is the first time you have ever come in here.

GUKI. No—oh, no! Nights when you are up there, watching the sky through that great black thing, I come in here and I hide behind that chest.

ANTINOV. Well, well! That's a strange thing. So you hide in here. But why should you? What are you hiding from?

GUKI. Shhhh! She might hear you.

ANTINOV. Perhaps she's gone away now. Come, if you hide in my room I should know about it. So you'd better tell me.

GUKI. Promise you won't tell. Promise you won't tell any one?

ANTINOV. Very well, then, I won't tell any one.

GUKI. I come here to . . . [*Heavy knocks on door.*]
There, she *is* there!

ANTINOV. What's to be done now?

GUKI. If I were to hide in that chest . . .

ANTINOV. Yes, yes. That's right. Quick, into the chest. So! [*GUKI hops into the chest. ANTINOV drops lid and hastens to the door.*] So it is you, goodwife Vaska. [*She*

enters angrily.] I hope I did not keep you waiting outside my door.

VASKA. Anton Antinov! Is this my house or is it not?

ANTINOV. It is your house, most assuredly, goodwife Vaska, your's and your good husband's: for were you not kind enough to rent this room to me? Pray be seated.

VASKA [*ignoring his motion to the stool*]. So it's my house, is it? And you keep me knocking on a door in my own house for one hour!

ANTINOV. Indeed, but perhaps I did not hear you at first. . . .

VASKA. You did not hear me! You have ears, but you did not hear me!

ANTINOV. Ah, but, you see, my work . . .

VASKA. Your work! Your work! You sit all day writing in a book or reading, and you sit up half the night staring at the moon, and you call that work. Shame on you, Anton Antinov! Do you know what you are? You're a lazy loafer, that's what you are!

ANTINOV. Alas, Vaska Nikolov, what you say seems true. Every clear night for fifty years I have studied the moon, and every day I have carefully written down all that I have learned. Now I am an old man, without a home, without friends, without a ruble in my pocket, and I have not yet proved what I have always believed: that there are people living in the moon.

VASKA. Rubbish! People living in the moon, indeed! And if there *were* people living in the moon, what difference should that make? Who knows or cares anything about the moon—except that it shines at night?

ANTINOV. There, now! That's what I've always said. Isn't that what I've always said? No one knows or cares anything about the moon except that it shines at night. But I, Anton Antinov, will prove that there are people living there—people living in the moon. Ah, Vaska Nikolov, your unbelief only gives me new hope. [*Starts up stairs.*]

VASKA [*scornfully*]. So I give you new hope, do I? And who is to give me three rubles a week for this room? Just tell me that, Anton Antinov. Perhaps you expect the people in the moon to give me three rubles a week for this room!

ANTINOV [*wearily, and coming back*]. So there it is again. Nothing matters but money. Vaska Nikolov, yesterday I spent my last penny for bread. I have not tasted food since then. How can I pay you?

VASKA. That's for you to answer. I suppose it isn't my fault you have no money. When you rented this room from me—this fine big room that ought to bring me six rubles a week instead of three, you said you earned plenty of money by making medicines for the sick. But look there: it is so long since you have done any work that your

flasks are covered with dust: when people come here for medicine you send them away; no, you can't be bothered because you must study the moon. Shame on you!

ANTINOV. You are right. Yes, you are right, Vaska Nikolov. But there are so many to make medicines—and so few to study the things about which all of us know so little.

VASKA. Of course I'm right. Why do you suppose I let you have this room for three rubles? I said to Leo Nikolov that with one in the house who could make medicines we should always have plenty of people to rent our rooms.

ANTINOV. Ah, you are like all the others. You think only of this little world and money, while I could tell you such things about the world up there—things you never dreamed of!

VASKA. Dreaming indeed! I have something to do besides dreaming. And you talk to me—you who do nothing all day long. Well, now I will tell you: since you do not pay for this room you can leave my house, Anton Antinov.

ANTINOV. No, no. Do not say that, Vaska Nikolov! Why, look at me—so old and so weak. Why, where could I go? You, Vaska Nikolov, you are young. But I am very old, and very, very tired—and there is so much to be done. My work has scarcely begun. Then have some pity. . . .

VASKA. No. You come here and you try to cheat a poor woman out of her money, so you can go. [*Knocking on*

door, and loud moans from without.] Heaven protect me. Now see what you have done! You keep me standing outside the door and then you talk so much I never have a chance to tell you that Leo Nikolov is almost dead with the toothache and has sent me for some medicine. [*More pounding and kicking on the door, followed by repeated and long-drawn-out groans.*]

ANTINOV. But you never told me! [*Hurries to door.*] Come in, my poor fellow. Come in, Leo Nikolov.

LEO. Vaska Nikolov. Is this my house or is it not? It is six years since you came for that medicine and you stand here talking—oh, oh, ooooooh, I shall die!

VASKA. I tell you it wasn't my fault. . . .

LEO. And you keep me standing outside my own door while you talk, talk, talk all the time: and I am nearly dead with this pain. You wicked woman—may every tooth in your head fall out!

VASKA [*screaming with rage*]. Now you wish a curse on me! First I am cheated out of my money and then I have a curse wished on me!

LEO. May your teeth fall out and your nails turn black, useless woman that you are—oh—oh—oh-h-h-h, my tooth!

VASKA [*to ANTINOV*]. There now! Now you can see what you have done. Cursed in my own house, all because you would talk nonsense about the moon!

LEO. So you will keep on talking! It doesn't matter if I die! Anton Antinov, I will pay you five rubles . . .

VASKA. Five rubles! You will pay him five rubles when he cheats me out of three rubles for this room? You shall not pay him one ruble. . . .

LEO. Five rubles—seven—eight—ten rubles if you can stop this toothache that is killing me! [*Throws coins on chest.*]

ANTINOV. Ten rubles, you said. Ah, that is very good. Just wait till I have prepared this medicine, Leo Nikolov. This will stop the ache, my poor fellow. Just have a little patience now—it will take only a little while—one, two, three, four. [*Counting drops which he pours from one of the flasks. As he takes up another flask and begins to count, VASKA goes to the chest.*]

VASKA. We'll see if I'm to be cheated—in my own house, too! [*She begins to gather the coins from the chest. GUKI knocks on the cover and slowly raises and lowers it. VASKA drops the coins, screaming with terror, and rushes for the door, dragging the bewildered LEO with her.*] Ah-h-h! This is the devil's own room! Look! Look there! [*The cover continues to rise and lower slowly.*]

LEO. May the Saints preserve us from the evil one! [*Both back out of the room in terror as ANTINOV watches them in amazement.*]

ANTINOV. But, Leo Nikolov—your medicine . . .

LEO. No, no—don't come near me! [*Exeunt LEO and VASKA.*]

GUKI [*leaping out of chest, picks up coins and gives them to ANTINOV*]. See what a wicked woman she is. She



would have stolen your money, so I knocked on the chest and frightened her away.

ANTINOV. So! That is why they ran out of my room screaming!

GUKI. Yes. They are afraid of the Evil One. Now you have plenty of money. Now you can buy bread and tea.

ANTINOV. Bread. Yes, yes, yes—bread. And more candles, too. Then we shall see—then we shall see. Come, you shall go with me, Guki—Guki the Moon Boy. [*He takes long cloak from hook on wall.*]

GUKI. No, I won't go with you. I must wait here—behind this chest. You see, he might come tonight.

ANTINOV. What do you say?

GUKI. I say, he might come tonight. That's what I was telling you when Vaska Nikolov came and pounded on the door. I wait here behind this chest on every moonlight night. Sometimes a moonbeam comes down the stairs. I chase him all around the room—but I never catch him. But some night—perhaps tonight—I shall catch him and I will never let him go until he carries me back with him to the moon! So now you know why I hide here.

ANTINOV. My poor boy! And now I know why the pupils call you Guki the Moon Boy.

GUKI. But you won't laugh at me. At first I was afraid you'd laugh, but in the chest there I heard what you said to Vaska Nikolov—about believing there were people in the moon.

ANTINOV. Yes, yes, I do believe that. But one can only believe that, and study in the hope that some day a sign may come to prove—to prove what I, Antinov, have *always* believed—that there are people in the moon.

GUKI [*eagerly*]. Perhaps, if I catch the moonbeam, I will bring you a message from the moon.

ANTINOV. My poor boy! My poor little Guki! So that is why you hide in my room. Alas, my child, I am afraid you are only dreaming. In all my fifty years of study I

have never heard or read that one could go to the moon, for it is thousands of miles away, and the men of this earth could not live there even if there were any way to reach the moon. All the learned men say that, and it is so written in all my books. So, you see, you must be dreaming. But I do not laugh at you. [*Takes candle and lights it from the one in the lantern.*]

GUKI. You are like the pupils in the school. You believe only what is written in books. I have never been to school and I cannot read books. So I do not know what the great ones believe. But when I have been to the moon I will come back to you and tell you all about it, because you do not laugh at me.

ANTINOV. You are only a little child—a strange little child. I would not laugh at you. Shall I find you here when I come back, Guki the Moon Boy? If I find you here when I come back, you shall tell me more of your strange dreams—because I do not laugh at you. [*Exit, carrying candle to light the stairs. GUKI follows to the door, listens intently for a moment, then closes it and runs up to the balcony, where he may be seen dimly as VASKA NIKOLOV enters protesting vigorously to PETER, NIKOLAS, and ALEXEY.*]

VASKA. I tell you there is nothing the matter.

PETER. How do we know that? There are strange things in this house, Vaska Nikolov. [*All murmur assent.*]

NIKOLAS. If there is nothing the matter, why did you

and Leo Nikolov run out of this room screaming? Such screaming that it made my blood run cold.

VASKA. I tell you it is nothing. [*Sees chest and starts back.*]

ALEXEY. If there is nothing, why do you jump like that? Why should you jump if there is nothing the matter? You saw her jump, Peter the cobbler, and Nikolas the baker?

PETER. We saw her jump, Alexey the jeweler. And I saw fear in her eyes. I tell you this is no place for a poor cobbler to live. Soon people will hear strange things of this house and then they will not bring their boots to me for mending for fear of having them witched! Then what will become of me?

ALEXEY. Yes, indeed, what will become of all of us? What about my jewels? Every one knows how people fear evil from jewels--no one will come to my shop and I shall starve.

NIKOLAS. And what of me? What of poor Nikolas the baker? Hasn't my bread turned sour for three days past?

When sour turns the bread
There's evil ahead!

And you, Vaska Nikolov, you are a fine one to keep this thing from us.

ALEXEY. Yes, that is true. You try to keep this from us. I remember now what happened one day not long ago.

That little gooseherd, Guki, was telling me about himself and you beat him for it. I was passing by the door afterwards and I heard you say that people would not come to live here if he told such things. So how can you explain that?

VASKA. Suppose I did beat him? What's so strange about that? He is a lazy, good-for-nothing half-wit, and unless I beat him he stays out late and loses the geese. I was joking when I said people wouldn't come here to live. Why shouldn't they come here? Just tell me that. [GUKI moves on the balcony and leans against the doorway, still watching the sky.]

PETER. Look! There he is now—there, on the balcony!

VASKA. Ha! Just let me at him. [*Starts up.*]

NIKOLAS [*pulling her back*]. Keep quiet, Vaska Nik-
olov. Stay where you are.

ALEXEY. Keep quiet, all of you. And draw back into the dark. Then we shall see for ourselves what is strange here, perhaps. [*They pull VASKA back into the corner with them as GUKI suddenly whirls about, leaps down the stairs, blows out the light in the lantern and draws back in the dark behind the chest. Gradually the moonlight grows brighter and brighter until suddenly there appears on the balcony as if he had just come from the sky, BEAM, a little boy dressed all in cloth of silver, and with little silver wings on his heels. His clothes are cut on*

exactly the same lines as GUKI's, and in his cap is a silver goose quill. He is just GUKI's size and looks like him, except that his face is very white. He dances hither and



thither as if searching for something until suddenly GUKI leaps from behind the chest and catches him, just as he is about to fly up the stairway.]

BEAM. Let me go—ah, let me go!

GUKI [*exultant*]. No! No! No! No!!

BEAM. You're hurting me—I'm afraid here—ah, let me go!

GUKI. No! I've waited so long to catch you. Now I won't let you go—not ever. Every moonlight night I've watched you come straight and swift through the night—like a silver bird you come.

BEAM. A silver bird that will never fly again if you keep me here. I live on the earth only by night. If ever I am here when the dawn comes, I shall die.

GUKI. Tell me one thing. If I let you go, will you take me with you—up there—to the moon?

BEAM. You—an earth child—to the moon?

GUKI. Yes, yes, yes, I tell you! To go up and up, with the clouds and the stars rushing by me—to come nearer and nearer, and then, suddenly, to *be* there—in the moon! Will you take me with you? If you are wise, you will take me with you!

BEAM. Ah, what shall I do? I cannot take you with me—and you will hold me here and I shall die. Ah, let me go—do let me go!

GUKI. No! I will not let you go. There is something I must know. Why do you come here to this place? What are you looking for?

BEAM. You wouldn't believe me if I told you. You're an earth child, and you wouldn't believe me.

GUKI. Ah, you don't know. I'm not like these earth people. And I don't belong here either. I'm queer. People

say I haven't all my wits. But I *know* things, strange things that are not written in books. But tell me—tell me why you come here.

BEAM. You will let me go, when I have told you?

GUKI. I do not promise. You must tell me first why you come.

BEAM [*cautiously and fearfully*]. I come to look for the little lost boy of the moon. You see, I'm his shadow. I lost him one night on the earth. We played here so long that before we knew it, Dawn came singing over the hills, and he hadn't time to jump back into me. You see, he used to steal away from me. He would run all about the fields painting the cobwebs silver-color and spreading great patches of moonlight over the lawns and terraces. He used to glide out over the lake trailing a long silver ribbon until people said, "See, how the moonlight makes a path in the water!" And then, one night, I lost him. I ran and ran, but I could not find him. Suddenly everything was still—still. Night lifted her arms and took the jewels from her hair; she folded her mantle about her and glided away, for Dawn was waking and singing there, beyond the hills! I could wait no longer. I cried out to her—"Wait, wait for me!" So Night stayed her flight to catch me in her arms and carry me back to the moon. But he, the little boy of the moon, was left behind. And every night, while the earth people are sleeping, I search for him, and Night

herself waits for me, till Dawn comes. Now I have told you—now let me go!

GUKI. But wait—but wait! When did you lose him? Was it when the leaves were turning red, and the grasses in the fields quite brown?

BEAM. How could you know that—you, an earth child? Why do you ask me that?

GUKI. No, no, I tell you! I do not belong here. It was my mistress, Vaska Nikolov who found me and brought me here to this place.

BEAM. Found you? [*Starts, and studies GUKI closely.*] Where did she find you?

GUKI [*speaking as if in a trance*]. In the fields, not far from this house. I was running all about—painting the cobwebs silver color. Suddenly everything was so very still. I was afraid. I called to you and I ran and ran, but I couldn't find you. . . .

BEAM [*rushing to GUKI, grasps both his hands and looks eagerly into his eyes*]. Ah, you! You! Are you . . . but no, see how brown you are. He was as pale as the moon!

GUKI. Brown, because all day long the sun shines upon my face and makes me so.

BEAM. Then stand here, close to me. Why, see, how everything about me is but the shadow of you! Oh, little lost boy of the moon, now I promise you, I will take you with me. Quick, quick! Creep into your shadow! [BEAM

opens wide his arms. GUKI, his own arms outstretched, goes slowly toward him. As their palms meet, the stage becomes totally dark. When the lights come on, only the figure of BEAM is seen. He feels himself all over, first in wonder and then in ecstasy; whirling, he runs up the stairs and stands in the doorway with his arms lifted to the sky.]

Oh, it is good to feel the silver wings upon my feet, and to fly again to the moon. [*This speech is spoken by GUKI, who is concealed on the balcony just outside the doorway. As BEAM disappears, the moonlight grows less intense. PETER, ALEXEY, NIKOLAS and VASKA come from their dark corner, shaking with fear and staring at the balcony.*]

ALEXEY. You heard what he said. As if he were talking to some one. And there was no one here. Did you see any one here?

VASKA. I saw no one. . . . I heard what he said, but I saw no one.

PETER. There was nothing at all but the moonlight.

NIKOLAS. But you heard what he said—and now he is gone!

ANTINOV [*entering with lighted candle*]. No, my friends, I am just returning. Pray make yourselves at home. [*They surround him in great excitement.*]

PETER. A strange thing has happened in this room!

ALEXEY. Before our very eyes. Is it not so?

NIKOLAS. And there was no one here—no one at all?

ANTINOV [*placing light on table*]. Come, come, what is it you are saying?

ALEXEY. That boy Guki. He was here, before our very eyes—and he disappeared—up there!

ANTINOV. Disappeared? Why, where could he go?

VASKA. He could go to the moon! And that's what he said. . . . Isn't that what he said?

ANTINOV. But surely you do not believe . . .

PETER. We believe what we see and hear!

VASKA. Anton Antinov, tonight you said you would prove there were people living in the moon. Well, now you can tell us what it is you see when you look through that strange black thing up there. Go now, and tell us what you see.

ANTINOV [*puzzled*]. I think you must be dreaming, all of you. But I will do what you ask, Vaska Nikolov. [*He goes to the balcony. The others gather at the foot of the stairs watching him closely. He looks down over the fields first, and then long and steadily at the moon. He makes a record in his notebook and then comes to the door and speaks*]. What says the hourglass now?

ALEXEY. One half the sands in the glass have fallen.

VASKA. What have you seen? What is it? What have you written there?

ANTINOV. I have written here, my friends, that at half

past the hour of nine on St. John's Eve, I stand on my balcony and look out over the silent fields; I see a maiden gathering herbs to put under her pillow that she may dream of her true love; I look up into the sky. It is a clear June night; the stars hang low in the heavens, and the moon is at full. [*He stands with the book clasped in his hands, looking up at the moon. VASKA pushes herself in front of the others.*]

VASKA. Anton Antinov, why do you not tell us the truth? What have you seen?

ANTINOV [*coming down*]. But, my good Vaska, I have told you.

ALEXEY. But we heard him say it—in this very room.

PETER. To the moon—he said he was going to the moon!

NIKOLAS. And now he is gone!

VASKA. And it is you, Anton Antinov, who are always talking about the moon. Didn't you tell me, not an hour ago, that you would prove there were people living there, in the moon?

ALEXEY. What is that you are saying?

PETER. Didn't I say there were strange things going on in this room?

ANTINOV. Come. Now I understand. Come, all of you, and I will explain. [*ANTINOV sits at his table and opens a great book of charts. The others are grouped about him, VASKA seated on the stool, watching suspiciously.*]

ANTINOV *traces the distance on the chart.*] You must know first that the moon is so many thousands of miles away that if you traveled all day and all night it would take years to reach it. But, my friends, before you had reached a point as far above the earth as is this place from our nearest city, you would have to turn back—or die.

PETER [*fascinated, goes to the stairs and looks up at moon*]. And yet, you say, people live there—on the moon.

ALEXEY and NIKOLAS. Yes, that is true. That's what you said. How then . . .

VASKA [*with growing conviction, silences them impatiently*]. Be still, both of you. Let him go on. Well then, Anton Antinov?

ANTINOV. Well then; just as there are creatures living under the water who would die on the land—as there are winged creatures of the air who could not live under the water, and just as we ourselves who live on this earth would perish if we should go too far either above or below its surface—so, I believe, there are people who can live only in the moon, and some day—some day there will come a sign to prove that, and to make people everywhere believe! [*Sadly.*] But I am so old—I shall not be here to read the sign! [*The three men are strangely fascinated, but VASKA breaks into a coarse laugh.*]

VASKA. I see everything clearly now—all this talk about the moon is nonsense. And you, Alexey, and you, Peter and

Nikolas—you stand there like three dunces believing all that is told you.

PETER. How do you make that, Vaska Nikolov?

ALEXEY. Take care how you speak to us!

VASKA. Why, it's as plain as your noses! That lazy gooseherd, who wastes half his time in this room and the other half staring at the moon, was only saying what he has heard this foolish old man say. I told you all along he was only a half-witted creature, not even to be trusted with tending the geese.

PETER. That may be true, what you say of him. But, where did he go?

ALEXEY. No doubt you are right, though, Vaska Nikolov. As for me, I did not believe this old man's words.

NIKOLAS. For myself, I did not believe it from the beginning!

PETER. And what of Peter the cobbler? Does any one think that *I* believed it? And yet it is all very strange. No one can deny that. It is all very well for you to talk, Vaska Nikolov—but does any one know where he is, now?

VASKA. Ho, ho! Where, indeed! He has climbed down from the balcony and is wandering in the fields this very minute. But tomorrow morning you will know well enough where he is. And this time when you hear me beating him, perhaps you will not be so ready, Alexey the

jeweler, to believe all he tells you afterwards. [ANTINOV, *who has been sitting at the table in deep thought, now interrupts them.*]

ANTINOV. No, no, Vaska. You shall not beat him. He is a very little child, and he is not like us. I cannot bear to have him beaten. And you are right in saying that it is all my fault. He hid in this chest in my room tonight and heard what I said to you about the moon!

VASKA. So it was he who rapped on the chest when I tried to take the money! *Now* do you believe that there is nothing strange about this house?

ALEXEY *and* NIKOLAS. It is all right, then. Yes. It was only that you screamed so.

PETER. I do not blame you either, Vaska Nikolov. You see, it was all very strange. . . .

VASKA. But it shall be so no longer. You, Anton Antinov, *you* to tell me I am not to beat him! Very well, you shall not see me beat him because you shall leave my house tonight. And this time not even Leo Nikolov shall save you. This is your last night in this room! Early to-morrow morning you shall go away from this place and never come back again. So what do you say to that? [ANTINOV, *who has risen to expostulate with her, now sinks into the chair and bows his head wearily.*]

NIKOLAS. Well, if he does not answer, I say good-night

to you, Vaska Nikolov, and good riddance to that old man.

ALEXEY. I say good-night also. I shall sleep in some peace now.

PETER. Yes, we shall all feel much obliged to you when all this is over.



VASKA. Good-night to all of you then—and as for this one, I have told you he shall go. [ALEXEY, PETER, and NIKOLAS go out together, repeating their good-nights and talking with each other.] Now then, why do you not answer me? You heard what I said to you just now. What do you say to that?

ANTINOV. Only that I think you are quite right, Vaska Nikolov—about my last night in this room. You see I am

very old, and very tired, and I am going far away from this place—farther away than the moon!

VASKA. Yes, no doubt. You are such a great traveler! But do not think I shall not watch what things you take from this room. Mind, you are not to take the medicines with you. There is nothing here that belongs to you except your worthless old books and that great black thing up there. So just mind what you take away with you!

ANTINOV. I promise you I shall take nothing. I shall need very little where I go. Now please go away and leave me. I must prepare for my journey.

VASKA. Your journey! One would think to hear you talk that you were a fine gentleman instead of a worthless old beggar. Your journey, indeed! Ha, ha! I will go tell the others that you are going to visit your friends in the moon! Perhaps they will be foolish enough to believe that, too. [*She goes to join the others, laughing mockingly. A moment later loud guffaws are heard from below. The room is very still. ANTINOV rises slowly from the chair and gropes his way to the stairway. He tries to climb the stairs, but is too weak. He struggles back to his chair, turns a page in his record book, takes up the quill with shaking hand and starts to write; but instead, the quill slides down the page, his hand falls at his side, and his head drops upon the table. ANTON ANTINOV has taken his long journey. Suddenly the balcony is flooded with intense light, and the*

silver-clad GUKI appears in the doorway. He glides down the stairs and comes to ANTINOV. He touches him lightly on the shoulder, then shakes him gently. Again a burst of loud laughter comes from below. GUKI, startled, makes



for the stairs, hesitates, then tiptoes back, coming down to the very front of the stage, and addressing the audience.]

GUKI. Sh-h-h! I came to bring him a message, but he is sleeping, and I dare not wait. When he wakens, tell him this for me: there *are* people living in the moon, but only old, old folk, and very little children will believe you. [Again laughter is heard, VASKA NIKOLOV's louder than

the rest as she cries shrilly, "And he said a sign would come one day to make people everywhere believe that it was so."

[GUKI, who has run part way up the stairs, pauses as VASKA speaks, and then with a gesture to the audience as if to say, "Did I not tell you so?" disappears from the balcony. The moonlight fades until the room is in darkness, and only the white head of ANTINOV may be seen resting upon his books.]

CURTAIN

JACQUENETTA AND THE QUEEN'S GOWN

CHARACTERS

✓ JACQUENETTA, *the Queen's seamstress.*

✓ UDGE, *the Queen's messenger.*

MISTRESS MANNEQUIN.

HIS HONOR THE JUDGE (THE SILVER THIMBLE).

. BOD.

\ KIN.

TINPIN.

\ MR. GOLDEYE.

MISTRESS WAX.

MISTRESS SILK THREAD.

MISTRESS EMERY.

NEEDLES, PINS, *and* SPOOLS OF THREAD.

SCENE. JACQUENETTA'S *sewing-room.*

JACQUENETTA AND THE QUEEN'S GOWN

The setting is a simple interior with entrances at upper right and left and at center; a window at lower left. There is a sewing table at right covered with various sewing materials, a partly finished gown, a vase of roses, and, in a conspicuous position, a work-basket lined with some bright color; a chair and foot-rest at the left of the table; a high-backed chair halfway between the table and window, and in the upper left corner of the room a mannequin half covered by a sheet; other chairs with material, pattern sheets, etc., about the room.

As the curtain rises, one sees JACQUENETTA standing near the table untangling several spools of thread. She finally succeeds in extricating one and throws the others, still in a tangle, into her work-basket. A clock from without strikes two.

JACQUENETTA. There! Now if no one disturbs me, I can sew all the afternoon. [*She makes great preparations for settling down to work, takes the gown from the table, and begins to sew. She has not taken more than two or three stitches when a loud knocking is heard on the street*

door.] Gracious! Whoever can that be? [*She runs to window and looks down.*] Whom do you wish, my good sir?

UDGE [*in a slow, drawling voice*]. Mistress, I am come hither to inquire the way to the house of Jacquenetta, she that doth make the Queen's gowns.

JACQUENETTA. Well, sir, you need go no farther, for I am indeed the Queen's seamstress; so open the door, come up one flight of stairs, and turn to the left. [*The door is heard to open and close noisily. JACQUENETTA turns away from window.*] Lack-a-day, what trouble is here? Another message from the Queen. [*Knock at door. She sighs.*] Come in. [*Enter UDGE. He is short and fat, with a huge red nose and corn-colored hair that sticks out in every direction. He wears doublet and hose, slippers that curl up on the ends, and a little pointed fool's cap. He looks for all the world like Simple Simon. He is mumbling to himself and counting on his fingers, taking no notice of JACQUENETTA.*]

Well, sir, have you a message for me?

UDGE [*ceases counting and speaks very pompously*]. Mistress, be you she that doth make the Queen's gowns?

JACQUENETTA. Indeed, yes. Have I not already told you so? But who are you—what have you to tell me?

UDGE. Who am I, indeed? I am the Queen's most important messenger. "Udge," quoth she, "thou art a good fellow; take these messages for me and see that no one be



WHOM DO YOU WISH, MY GOOD SIR?

forgotten and thou shalt have a half-holiday." "Your Highness," quoth I, "have no fear. Give me the messages, and I will take the half-holiday."

JACQUENETTA. Well, that's all very fine, I am sure, but I should like to know what message she has sent to me.

UDGE. Have patience, good Jacquenetta. As the Queen once said to me, "Udge," quoth she—

JACQUENETTA. If you please, sir, the message.

UDGE. Well, then—so I will. [*Sits on chair and begins counting on his fingers, beginning with the little one.*] One! To remind the Head Musician to stop playing as soon as the King and Queen are seated upon the throne. That I have done as I have good cause to remember, for when I told him, he did set about such a cuffing of my ears and a twisting of my nose that I knew not which was t'other, nor cared neither, for both of them hurt the worst.

JACQUENETTA. Why, how could that be? How could *both* of them hurt worst?

UDGE [*disapprovingly*]. Mistress, if you interrupt me, I shall never get to the end [*wiggling his thumb*] which is your message. As the Queen once said to me . . .

JACQUENETTA. Oh, very well, very well. Go on—I won't interrupt you again.

UDGE. Well, then—two! That twelve footmen instead of six should attend the royal coach. Six! To tell cook to put an extra layer of jam on all the tarts—that I have

done, too, for when I told her what a beating I had got from the musician, she gave me a tart *and* a kiss and I tell thee I know not which was the sweeter. Three! That all the clocks should be set ahead two hours and a minute so as to save candles. Seventh and last! To—to—to—now by my soul I have forgot what I was to tell thee!

JACQUENETTA. Oh, you stupid, stupid fellow! Have you wasted all this time and now cannot tell what message the Queen has sent to me?

UDGE [*going over his counting*]. Now the first, I do remember, was to tell the musician—

JACQUENETTA. Oh, stop, stop! I shall go crazy with your endless counting. Be quiet a moment and mayhap your few wits will find themselves. Truly, an *I* were the Queen, I should not choose a fool for my messenger!

UDGE [*aggrieved*]. An you were the Queen, my mistress, you could tell me what message I was to carry to Jacquenetta. But you are not the Queen. Now just the other day the Queen said to me, “Udge,” quoth she—

JACQUENETTA [*savagely*]. Stop talking! THINK!

UDGE [*suddenly and with great hope*]. Mistress! Now in truth if you are *not* a Queen, you are a lady and wear clothing like to, if not so rich, as the Queen's. Now had you sent a message to a seamstress, what would you have said?

JACQUENETTA. Truly, I am a greater fool than you or

I had thought of that in the beginning. Why, look you, mayhap I should wish the sleeve to be tighter, or the skirt longer, or more lace in the neck, or more buttons on the back. [*As she names each possibility, she points to a corresponding part of her dress.*] What! Do you remember now?

UDGE [*who has jumped with excitement at each possibility, only to be submerged again into gloom*]. No, Mistress. Whatever she said, it was none of these.

JACQUENETTA [*in desperation seizing the gown and holding it before him*]. See! Here is the Queen's gown—it must be the most beautiful gown ever made, for tomorrow night she is to wear it at the grand ball. Can you not remember—

UDGE [*jumping up, capering about, and shouting with joy*]. Ha! Ha! Ha! Juno be praised! Long live the Queen! Tirrala, tirrala, tirrali! Mistress, said you *tomorrow* night? Hear you then the Queen's message. "Udge," quoth she, "whatever happens, forget not to tell Jacquenetta that she is to send my gown to me at *once*, for the King has changed his mind again, and the ball takes place tonight!"

JACQUENETTA [*falling into chair, moaning and weeping*]. Oh—oh—woe is me, woe is me!

UDGE [*greatly surprised*]. Why, how now? What's the matter, Mistress?

JACQUENETTA. Matter enough. The gown is not done

and I can never finish it before tomorrow. You wretched, wretched Udge! Had you told me at first I might have finished it, but now it is too late. Oh, what a day is this!



My needles rusty, and my pins bent, and my thread all in a tangle—and now this message from the Queen. Oh, woe is me—

UDGE. Mistress, could she not wear it as it is? [*Holding the gown before him and looking at it speculatively.*]

JACQUENETTA [*snatching it from him*]. No, no—you stupid thing—why, see for yourself, the sleeves are not done, the buttons are not on, and all the trimming—oh, dear, oh, dear—

UDGE. Well, I am right sorry for you then, for it was a most important message. Now, belike, I shall lose my half-holiday.

JACQUENETTA. I care not for that—get you gone from here! Oh, me, when the Queen hears this I shall be banished from the kingdom.

UDGE. Well then, I'll go—but I'll come back this evening, and if it be not done—

JACQUENETTA [*chasing him out*]. Go away—go away, I say! [*She runs to sewing-box and hurriedly pulls out needles and thread, takes up gown, and then bursts into despairing tears. The MANNEQUIN in the corner throws off her covering and comes briskly, with a jerky mechanical gait, across the room. She is dressed in a tight-fitting black dress with tape measures about the bust and waist line and over the shoulder.*]

MANNEQUIN. Tut, tut, my dear, what's this, what's this, what's this?

JACQUENETTA [*in amazement, rubbing her eyes*]. Mercy on us! Am I dreaming?

MANNEQUIN. Not at all, my dear, not at all. It's quite the simplest thing in the world. My, but I'm warm being

covered up for so long! [*Fanning herself with handkerchief.*]

JACQUENETTA [*aside*]. If this is *real*—well, I could believe *anything*. [*To MANNEQUIN.*] Please excuse me a



moment; I want to pinch myself to make sure I'm not dreaming.

MANNEQUIN. Hm-m. What queer ideas you humans have. Now I could pinch myself all day long without knowing any more about it than when I began—but then, I'm not a human. Well, why don't you do it?

JACQUENETTA [*still staring in open-mouthed wonder*]. D-d-do what?

MANNEQUIN. Pinch yourself? Isn't that what you said?

JACQUENETTA. Oh! Yes—I—I—will. [*She turns her head away, and closing her eyes tight, solemnly pinches herself; then turns slowly and looks into the eyes of the MANNEQUIN, who is yawning, and waits with a very bored look.*] It's true. You're really here.

MANNEQUIN. Certainly it's true, and of course I'm here. Now then, tell me what all the trouble is about.

JACQUENETTA. My goodness! You frightened me so, I forgot all about it. Oh, Miss Mannequin—

MANNEQUIN. Mrs., if you please. My husband is first aid to the King's tailor.

JACQUENETTA. Oh! Please excuse me—Mrs. Mannequin. You see, the Queen is to attend a royal ball this evening, and she has sent for her gown, and it isn't done, and if I don't have it ready when Udge comes back I shall be banished from the kingdom and—

MANNEQUIN. Wait a minute—wait a minute. One thing at a time. There, there, now. Don't cry—Tut! Tut! Why, what a silly child you are, to be sure. Why don't you ask me to help you?

JACQUENETTA. Oh, Miss Mannequin—I mean Mrs.—if only you would!

MANNEQUIN. Well, I will, but you must do just as I tell you, because I can't sew a stitch myself—never could and guess I never will.

JACQUENETTA [*in dismay*]. You—can't—sew? Then—oh—I'm afraid you don't understand after all.

MANNEQUIN [*brusquely*]. Nonsense! Of course I understand, and I'm going to help you, but first, you must promise to do whatever I ask of you.

JACQUENETTA. I promise—cross my heart.

MANNEQUIN. There! Now that's the way I like to hear you talk. First, then, take your work-basket and place it on the floor outside that door. [JACQUENETTA *places basket outside door at center back.*] Now listen carefully while I tell you something no one else in all the world knows. On a certain day of the year, nobody knows just when, all the things in a work-basket come to life, and everything from the oldest, rustiest needle, to the youngest bright new pin has a chance to tell its troubles before a judge. And woe to those work-basket people who have been lazy and shiftless, for the judge sentences them to hard labor: they have to finish whatever sewing there is to be done before the sun goes down on that day.

JACQUENETTA. Oh, oh! How very queer!

MANNEQUIN. Hush! Come closer now—no one must hear. Last night, after you had gone, and the room was dark and still, I heard a voice from the work-basket say, "Tomorrow shall be the day of Judgment." It was the voice of the Judge—the Silver Thimble.

JACQUENETTA. Why, Mrs. Mannequin! [*Taking her*

thimble from table and looking at it incredulously.] Do you mean that they really and truly come to life; that they talk and—and everything?

MANNEQUIN. That's just what I mean, but there is one thing I have not yet told you. As long as there are any mortals near, the work-basket people cannot come to life, so I must cast a charm that will make us both invisible—then we shall see— [*A noise as of quarreling and fighting is heard from outside.*] Quick! Close your eyes tight and hold your thumbs. Are you ready?

JACQUENETTA. I—I guess so. Yes.

MANNEQUIN [*solemnly, and waving her arm in circular motion*].

Rumble, rumble in the pot,
Onzel, twozel, zigzall, zam;
Bob-tail vinegar, tickle and tan,
Ham, scam, virgin, man,
Tee taw law—*Buck!*

[*As she says the last word, the stage grows black just long enough for the MANNEQUIN and JACQUENETTA to go out, and as the stage grows light, a huge work-basket, the exact replica of the small one placed outside the door, is seen at center back. The cover is drawn slowly up, as if by magic, revealing a huge pair of scissors on the underside of it; a portion of the front side of the basket falls*

down, forming a runway over which the fighting, quarrelling people of the work-basket enter. As the commotion reaches its climax, MR. GOLDEYE climbs up and over one corner of the basket. He is dressed as a typical dandy, but sadly disarranged by the fray. His high hat is crushed low over his ears, and he makes a comical picture as he tries to straighten his hat and cravat, and places his gold-rimmed monocle in his eye.]

MR. GOLDEYE [*inanely*]. What bally blighters! [*The shouts within turn to "There he is—there, on the top. After him, comrade pins!"*] TINPIN, dressed in full tin armor, and brandishing a sword, jumps up behind MR. GOLDEYE who immediately jumps down to floor. More pins rush out and surround MR. GOLDEYE, who finally takes refuge under the right end of the table.]

TINPIN [*directing the others*]. Bravo, my fine pins! Well done! On with the battle! [*Enter MISTRESS WAX, weeping and wringing her hands helplessly, and pursued by the SPOOLS OF THREAD; MISTRESS SILK THREAD, who, dodging the blows of the SPOOLS OF THREAD and the pins who have now left MR. GOLDEYE, crawls under the left end of the table; last of all MISTRESS EMERY, very red-faced and flustered, and pursued by NEEDLES, who seem to be jabbing themselves into her. TINPIN leaps to floor.*] Forward, my soldier pins! Leave not a needle or a spool of thread. [*TINPIN and PINS rush against the NEEDLES, and*

all, except Mr. GOLDEYE and MISTRESS SILK THREAD, join in another free-for-all fight. Enter, on the runway, His Honor the JUDGE, the Silver Thimble, accompanied by BOD and KIN.]

BOD and KIN. Make way, make way, for His Honor the Judge, the Most High Silver Thimble!

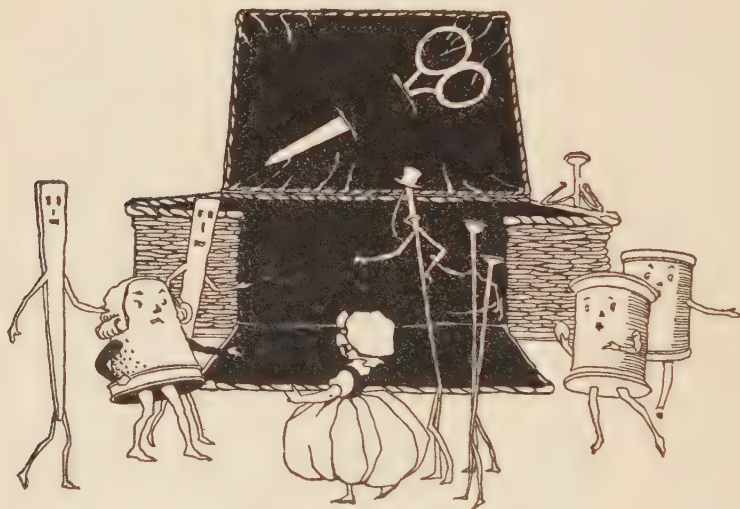
JUDGE. Silence! What means this vulgar uproar? Back! Back, I say—all of you back, and make way! [*Crowd falls back.*] Tinpin, you are my prisoner! [BOD and KIN rush to TINPIN and lead him to left of the chair at stage left to which the JUDGE comes and sits.] Now then! Who will inform us as to the cause for this unseemly exhibition? [*All shouting together, Mr. GOLDEYE and MISTRESS SILK THREAD crawling from under the table to join in.*]

ALL. Your Honor, it wasn't my fault—don't blame me—

JUDGE. Silence! How can we be expected to understand such meaningless gabble? We will choose for ourselves some one of you to speak. Bring forth the prisoner. [BOD and KIN lead TINPIN before JUDGE.] Tinpin, what have you to say for yourself?

TINPIN [*indignantly*]. Your Honor, it has been our custom for many years, as you know, to hold once each year, a work-basket party. [*All murmur assent.*] Well, this is the afternoon which we had chosen for it. I and my brave pins were working as hard as we could to help

finish the Queen's new gown. Why, we even hoped to have it finished last night so we could have all morning to prepare for the party. But the needles were so careless that they pricked Jacquenetta's fingers so she couldn't finish the gown.



NEEDLES. It is not so—not so! Your Honor! Hear us! [*General uproar again. BOD and KIN rush in to separate them.*]

JUDGE. Silence! Mr.—er—Mr. Goldeye, what have you to say for your needle friends?

MR. GOLDEYE [*swaggering out and adjusting his monocle*]. Aw—really, your Honah! I haven't an idea what all this bally rumpus is about, don't you know? I rarely—

ah—er—rarely associate with these—er—these steely-eyed needles—but if you'd really like my opinion—

NEEDLES [*surrounding MR. GOLDEYE*]. Down with him—traitor! Dandy with his gold eye—take that—and that—and that! [*BOD and KIN again bring them to order.*]

JUDGE. Silence in the Court! The next person who speaks out of order will be severely punished. Mistress Silk Thread! You look as if you wanted to say something.

MISTRESS SILK THREAD. Well, of course, your Honor, it doesn't make any difference to *me*, but I think it's the fault of Mistress Wax. [*MISTRESS WAX begins weeping and moaning.*] Of course, it doesn't make *any* difference to *me*, because I'm smooth and silky all the time and never cause any trouble, but my second cousins, who are only made of cotton, need Mistress Wax to keep them smooth and strong and out of a tangle. Of course, it doesn't make any difference to me, only . . . [*Such loud wailing from MISTRESS WAX that no more can be heard. MISTRESS EMERY comforts her and both weep together.*]

JUDGE [*greatly perplexed*]. Dear, dear, dear! What are we to do now? Calm yourselves, I beg of you. Now, now, Mistress Wax. Just tell us what you have to say.

MISTRESS WAX [*dropping on her knees before him and swaying back and forth, weeping and moaning*]. Oh, your Honor! I've served in this work-basket, day in and day out for years and no one has ever said anything against

me before, and I'm that sensitive, too! [*Bursting into loud wails.*]

JUDGE. There, there, my good woman! Compose yourself.

MISTRESS WAX. Oh, sir, if I do say it as shouldn't, I've always tried to lead a good life. Why, sir, look at my face and arms—all lined and cut from the thread that I have patiently waxed day after day. And as for Mistress Silk Thread—often enough I've heard Mistress Jacquenetta berate her for snarling and breaking—

MISTRESS SILK THREAD. How dare you, you waxy old woman!

JUDGE. Silence! Continue, Mistress Wax.

MISTRESS WAX. Well, as I've said before, I always try to do my duty, as my cotton threads will tell you.

COTTON THREADS. That she has, your Honor. Mistress Silk Thread always was a smooth one with her stories. [*All agree.*]

MISTRESS WAX. To think this should have happened to me! [*Weeping.*] Your Honor, may I melt, thaw, and dissolve if I am to blame for the sad conditions in this work-basket. Now-w! Oh-h-h-h, nobody ever s-s-aid anything about me be-be-before! [*Weeping and going to THREADS, who comfort her and cast looks of anger at MISTRESS SILK THREAD.*]

JUDGE [*exasperated*]. Tush! Also tut, tut! Are we

never to hear the real cause of this trouble? My supplicants, we appeal to you—is there no one who can tell us the truth, the whole truth? [*Long pause as JUDGE waits. All whispering and discussing under their breath with angry looks at each other. MISTRESS EMERY starts to move toward JUDGE as MR. GOLDEYE speaks.*]

MR. GOLDEYE. Oh, I say! How unusual. Nobody wants to talk. Perhaps this would be a good time to express my opinion, your Honor!

JUDGE [*sternly*]. Hold your tongue, sir! Mistress Emery, were you about to speak?

MISTRESS EMERY [*very much out of breath*]. Yes, sir, I *have* something to say, and I think it will be just about as important as any opinions of that young dandy with his gold eye.

MR. GOLDEYE. All the same you know, old dear, *you* haven't always been so ready and willing to smooth off the rough edges of my steely-eyed needle friends when they came to you for help, now have you?

MISTRESS EMERY [*redder and shorter of breath than before*]. That's all right, my young dude; Mistress Emery will speak for herself.

JUDGE. Quite right, quite right. Proceed, Mistress Emery.

MISTRESS EMERY. First of all, I just want to say that Mistress Wax and myself have been in this work-basket

longer than anybody else here and I've been here longer than Mistress Wax, and I want to assure you that I know what I'm talking about.

MR. GOLDEYE. How very extraw'd'nary! [*All begin to titter.*]

JUDGE [*jumping up and pounding his gavel*]. Silence! Bod, tie something over Mr. Goldeye's mouth and keep him quiet. [*Business of tying a huge handkerchief over MR. GOLDEYE'S mouth.*]

Now, then! Another interruption, and we will sentence every one present to one year's hard labor. Mistress, continue.

MISTRESS EMERY. Well, as I said, I am the oldest here, and I remember that when I first came, I was pale and small enough, but I've grown ripe with the years, and I expect they'll soon want to replace me with a young person, so I'm going to make every effort to help get things settled and in happier condition before she comes.

JUDGE. We are pleased to hear that, Mistress Emery. It shows a good spirit.

MISTRESS EMERY. Thank you, sir. I've always had plenty of grit in me, and I've enough still for that matter. As for Mistress Wax, who came a few years after me, she's a good woman, but she's always been kind of soft and easy like, and I always try to stand up for her too. Now, the whole trouble is this. [*Every one shows interest.*] Ever since

your last visit here, we've all been finding fault with each other and trying to shove our own work on to some one else's shoulders. I mean myself as well as the others. We've all done a whole lot of talking and nobody has done much work.

JUDGE [*wisely*]. Ah! I think we are approaching the real cause of the trouble now.

MISTRESS EMERY. Well, things just got worse and worse until everything went wrong—the thread tangled, the needles rusted and broke, and the pins bent and ran away, and nobody cared about anything. Then along came Jacquenetta with yards and yards of cloth to be made into a gown for the Queen just as we work-basket people had planned our party which we hold every year. So Tinpin there, who always has been a kind of pinhead about such things, started a riot. And that's the truth—the whole truth.

JUDGE [*after pondering a moment*]. Hm-m. We understand now. So it really was the fault of— [*All kneel and cry, "Not me, your Honor, not me!"*]—the fault of *every one*.

ALL. Oh!

MISTRESS EMERY. Ay, your Honor, every one. [*She also kneels.*]

JUDGE. Therefore, we decree: First, that since it was not his fault alone, Tinpin be released with the warning that

should he ever start another riot, his head will be promptly taken off, and what earthly good is a pin without a head?

Second, that we are disposed to be lenient and declare that if every one will set about his and her own work with a willing and cheerful spirit, and complete the Queen's gown before sunset of this day, there shall be a party this evening to which the people of every work-basket in the kingdom shall be invited.

ALL [*breaking into cheers and embracing each other*].
Hurrah! Three cheers for the Judge—long live his Highness, the Silver Thimble.

JUDGE. Silence! Hear me yet another moment. Let us try, my friends, each to do his own task, each day in the year, for that is the only way to find peace and harmony. Now then, no more talk, but forward to work! [*TINPIN seizes the gown and holding it high over his head on his sword, leads the way into the work-basket. The others, keeping step and orderly columns, march up and into the basket, cheering the JUDGE as they enter. Last of all, the JUDGE and BOD and KIN enter. The front side of the basket is drawn up, and the cover falls down as the stage grows black and the MANNEQUIN's voice is heard.*]

MANNEQUIN.

Rumble, rumble in the pot,
Onzel, twozel, zigzall, zam,
Bob-tail vinegar, tickle and tan

Ham, scam, virgin, man,
Tee, taw, law—*Buck!*

[*Lights flash on. Stage is just as in the beginning, and the MANNEQUIN and JACQUENETTA in the same places. On the table lies the finished gown. JACQUENETTA rubs her eyes in amazement.*]

JACQUENETTA. My goodness! Is this really my room, and am I really Jacquenetta? [*She pokes the MANNEQUIN, who is staring straight before her and pays no attention to JACQUENETTA. JACQUENETTA sees gown, and as she cries out with joy and runs to it, examining it, the MANNEQUIN leans way forward and winks solemnly at audience; then jerks herself over to the pedestal and throws sheet over her head.*]

Oh! Oh! Oh! Mrs. Mannequin, it's all done! Oh, how wonderful— [*Turns and sees that Mrs. MANNEQUIN has returned to her pedestal. She drops into chair in amazement.*] Why—what in the world! [*Loud knocking heard at door. JACQUENETTA runs to window as before.*]

Who's there?

UDGE. Mistress Jacquenetta, the Queen hath sent me for her gown.

JACQUENETTA. Oh, Udge! Dear friend Udge! Come up, my good fellow! It's all ready. [*Hastily tying it up in a cretonne bag. Enter UDGE at center as before.*]

UDGE [*eagerly*]. Mistress! Said you the gown was ready?

JACQUENETTA. Here it is—all ready.

UDGE [*capering about*]. Oh, kind Heaven! Oh, Juno be praised—tirrala, tirrala, tirralli—I shall not lose my half-holiday— [*Suddenly.*] Mistress—how came it finished?

JACQUENETTA. Oh, Udge,—it is a long, strange story. Hasten with the gown to the Queen, and then come back and I will tell you all about it.

UDGE. That I will, Mistress. [*Singing as he goes out.*]

Oh, what a jolly gay time we shall have
With half-holiday spent at the Fair.

[*Song suddenly stops and UDGÉ reënters with work-basket.*]

Mistress, is not this your work-basket?

JACQUENETTA. Why, so it is! I had forgotten all about it. Oh, how strange it all seems. But hurry, Udge.

UDGE. Fare you well, Mistress. Fare you well. [*Exit singing.*]

We'll have candies and sweetmeats and ribbons galore
And pop-guns enough and to spare.

JACQUENETTA [*opening basket*]. Why, how very queer! There is not a tangle here—every spool and every pin and needle in its place. But what is this? [*Takes out a little*

envelope and reads.] "A message to mortals from the work-basket people." [*Opens envelope and takes out note.*] "To every mortal that has a work-basket—whether she be a Queen or a Princess, or a seamstress or only a very little girl: The work-basket people will always be ready



to help you if you take care of us and put us away each day in our proper places.

So here's to every one of us
Including Tinpin and the Judge
And here's to Jacquenetta
And that funny, funny Udge.

[Trumpets and the sound of crowds passing by are heard from the street.]

Oh! The grand procession to the Queen's ball! *[She snatches the roses from the table, and standing at the window, throws them out, one by one, as the curtain steals softly down.]*

CURTAIN

THE PRINCESS AND THE CRYSTAL PIPE

CHARACTERS

TREE NYMPH.

WATER SPRITE.

FIREFLY.

THE PRINCESS.

TIMA, *her maid.*

FOUR ROYAL GUARDS.

ZAMI, *a gypsy boy.*

THE FAIRY GODMOTHER.

TIME. *Long, long ago.*

SCENE. *The garden of the royal palace.*

THE PRINCESS AND THE CRYSTAL PIPE

As the curtain rises, one sees an old-fashioned garden, masked in on both sides by trees, and all across the back by a garden wall with a solid gate in the center. It is nearly sunset time of an early autumn day, and the garden is flooded with the red-gold glow of the sun. Enter the TREE NYMPH at lower right. She is dressed in a clinging robe of leaf-green: her long, straight brown hair is crowned with a wreath of autumn leaves. She steals cautiously into the garden, and when satisfied that she is quite alone, runs lightly across to the entrance at lower left.

TREE NYMPH. H'-s-st! Water Sprite! Water Sprite! Come quickly! It is nearly sunset time, and the Princess will soon be here. Water Sprite, are you coming? [*A low ripple of laughter is heard, and WATER SPRITE appears at lower left. She seems to have just risen from the depths of some dark, shadowy pool, her pale green dress covered with clinging reeds and grasses, her golden hair entwined with water-lilies.*]

WATER SPRITE. Oh, I ran so fast I'm all out of breath! Am I very late? I've been playing hide-and-seek with the

little silver fish in my pool. I was hiding in the long grasses when you called, and they wound themselves about me until I could scarcely break away. The little silver fish



can never find me now—but—but—I've never been so far away from my pool before—I'm afraid here—

TREE NYMPH. No, no. You must not be afraid—but don't speak too loudly or we may be discovered, and fairies, you know, must not be seen until the sun goes down.

WATER SPRITE [*softly*]. Then I shall speak very, very softly. But please, pretty Tree Nymph, why is the Princess carried into this garden every evening at sunset time, and why is she always so sad?

TREE NYMPH. Because of a wicked spell.

WATER SPRITE. A wicked spell! Oh, who could have been so cruel?

TREE NYMPH. Come, sit down by me, and I will tell you all about it. [*They sit right of center.*] When the Princess was six months old, her royal parents gave a great birthday feast, and invited all the good people of their kingdom, rich and poor alike, to attend. Now a wicked old witch, who was jealous of the Queen, dressed herself in fine clothes and came to the party. When no one was looking she leaned over the cradle and mumbled,

Hocus-Pocus, day and night,
What is wrong can ne'er be right.
She shall live and learn to talk
But she shall never, never walk.

And from that day to this, the little Princess has never taken a step by herself.

WATER SPRITE. Oh! Oh! Oh! How terrible! Will she never, never, never walk?

TREE NYMPH. Not until the spell is broken, and no one in the whole world knows how to break it.

WATER SPRITE. Oh, Tree Nymph! I am so sad. I shall go weep until my pool is filled with tears.

TREE NYMPH. No, no, little Water Sprite. You must not do that. We must try to make the Princess happy. [*Lights begin to grow dim.*]

WATER SPRITE. Oh, could we? Could we make her happy?

TREE NYMPH. Perhaps. At least we can try. Every night, just after the sun goes down, I set all my little leaves to dancing and whispering secrets to the Princess. Tonight, when the Princess passes, you and your water fairies must sparkle and glisten in the moonlight, and the little silver fish must leap higher than ever.

WATER SPRITE. Yes, yes, we shall sparkle like costly jewels in the moonlight.

TREE NYMPH. We must all do our very best, and perhaps, who knows—perhaps tonight the spell may be broken. [*As she speaks the last words, the FIREFLY hops on the wall at left of center. He is a queer little fat fellow, in a brown suit, with close-fitting brown cap and gauzy brown and yellow wings. In one hand is fastened a "bug" light, or in his cap, a light regulated by a button and a wire from his hand. He hops down into the garden, and flashing his light, speaks in a jerky manner, hopping nearer to the fairies with each word.*]

FIREFLY. Very—like—it—may!

WATER SPRITE *and* TREE NYMPH. Oh—Oh!—Oh!
[WATER SPRITE *starts to run home, but stays when* TREE NYMPH *speaks.*]

TREE NYMPH. Oh! So it's only you. I thought—I don't know *what* I thought. Water Sprite, this is Firefly.

WATER SPRITE [*timidly*]. Oh, sir, you frightened me!



I'm—I'm very glad to meet you. Very like it may—what?

FIREFLY [*disdainfully*]. Humph! If that isn't just like a silly fairy! [*Mimicking her.*] Very—like—it—may—what? Very—like—it—may! That's what I said, and I say it again. Very—like—it—may!

TREE NYMPH. Come, come, Firefly. Your light is worse than your bite. Tell us what you mean.

FIREFLY [*astonished*]. Tell you what I mean, indeed! I mean what I say. Very—like—

WATER SPRITE. Yes, sir, we believe you, sir, but what did you *mean* to say?

FIREFLY. That's what I'm trying to tell you, if you'll ever stop talking long enough. You said that perhaps the spell might be broken tonight, and I said, and I *meant* to say, and I *do* say, very—like—it—may!

WATER SPRITE *and* TREE NYMPH. Oh, Firefly, tell us! Have you heard something?

FIREFLY [*groaning*]. Now there you go again. Will you ever get any sense in your heads? If I *hadn't* heard something, how would I know that very—like—

TREE NYMPH. Stop blinking your light and tell us what, *what*, WHAT you have heard.

FIREFLY [*very superciliously*]. I have heard that you were a very saucy fairy, and now I know it. Besides, why shouldn't I blink my light? That's what it's for. Now, if you'll listen a moment— [*Trumpet sounds in distance.*]

TREE NYMPH. There! Now you've used up all the time with your senseless chatter, and the Princess is coming. Quick, Water Sprite, to your pool, and do not forget to be happy and bright. [*Exit WATER SPRITE.*] Firefly, if the spell should be broken tonight—

FIREFLY. Very—like—it—may! [*Exit FIREFLY at upper right.*]

TREE NYMPH. Oh! How I wish it might. [*Exit lower right. Enter at upper left the PRINCESS, carried on a litter*

by four royal guards and accompanied by TIMA, her maid.]

TIMA. We are late tonight, Princess. The sun is almost set behind the hills.

PRINCESS [*wearily*]. Oh, Tima, I care not if it be late or early. Place me there [*pointing right*], so that when the moon comes up it will shine on my face. [*They place her, and TIMA arranges cushions about her. Guardsmen stand at attention.*] That is all now. You may go, and do not come for me until I send word to you. [*Exeunt guardsmen, upper left.*]

TIMA. My Princess, will you not smile just once? All the kingdom is filled with sorrow because you are ever sad.

PRINCESS. How can I smile when my heart is ever sad? If only I could walk, Tima, I should care for nothing else in all the world. I would rather be a poor little beggar maid who could walk than a Princess who must always be carried about like a baby.

TIMA. Is there nothing else in all the world that could make you happy?

PRINCESS. There is nothing else in all the world, Tima.

TIMA. Oh, Princess, think you the spell will ever be broken?

PRINCESS [*breaking into tears*]. I cannot tell—oh, if only I knew how to break the wicked spell!

TIMA. Please, oh, please, my lady, do not weep! I would rather die than see your Highness weep. [*Moonlight floods the garden.*]



PRINCESS. Dear Tima! I will weep no more. See, the moonlight streams into the garden. Go, Tima, bring me my crystal pipe, and we will blow bubbles up to the moon.

TIMA. Shall you not be afraid to stay alone in the garden?

PRINCESS. No, no, the good fairies will keep watch over me. I shall not be afraid.

TIMA. Then I will run every step of the way and bring you the crystal pipe. [*Exit upper left.*]

PRINCESS. Dear, kind Tima! What should I do without her? But I cannot smile, for my heart is filled with tears. How happy all the others are. I can hear the little leaves laughing and whispering to each other—and tonight, when we passed by the pool, it shimmered and sparkled like diamonds. I alone am sad—and I can keep the tears back no longer. [*She throws her head in her arms and weeps. The soft twanging of a guitar is heard, and a voice sings on the other side of the wall.*]

VOICE.

Lady Moon, Lady Moon,
Wilt thou be my bride?
I'll buy thee a cup and a silver spoon,
With sweet cakes and honey beside.

[PRINCESS *starts up and listens.*]

Lady Moon, Lady Moon,
Wilt thou be my bride?
I'll buy thee a gown and silver shoon,
And a little white cottage beside.

PRINCESS. What a beautiful song! How I wish he would sing again! Oh, whoever you are, sing, sing again! [*Listens.*] Alas! He cannot hear me, and I cannot walk to

the wall. If only—ah! I know! [*She tears a rose from her gown and throws it over the wall, then waits eagerly. Enter, on top of the wall, ZAMI, a gypsy boy. He is dressed in soft shirt, thrown open at neck, black knickers, and tam-o'-shanter. About his waist is a bright sash; on a cord slung over his shoulder he carries a guitar. He sits on the wall in the moonlight, and, with the rose in one outstretched hand, speaks in a low, gypsy drawl.*]

ZAMI. Lady, the rose!

PRINCESS [*startled*]. Oh, why—why—I didn't mean that you were to come in.

ZAMI. But the rose—he fall on my face, he kiss my lips. He say, "Zami, come to the most beautiful lady."

PRINCESS [*confused*]. Well, you see, I heard you singing, and then you stopped. I wanted you to sing again so—so I threw the rose. But you really must not come in here.

ZAMI [*coaxing*]. Oh, lady, let me come in? I *was* singing, yes, to my sweetheart—she is the moon! But she is not so beautiful as you. Let me come in, lady?

PRINCESS [*hesitatingly*]. Why—I—I— Oh, *yes!* Come in and sing your sweetest songs to me. [*ZAMI jumps down into the garden, kisses the rose, and gives it to her.*]

ZAMI. Oh—now I give the rose to the most beautiful lady. [*Sings.*]



LADY, THE ROSE!

Lady fair, lady fair,

Wilt thou be my love?

I'll give thee a rose for thy golden hair,

And I'll bring thee a snow-white dove.

PRINCESS. How beautifully you sing! Come sit by me, and tell me who you are, and how you came to my garden.

ZAMI [*kneeling before her*]. Lady, there is not much to tell. I am Zami—a poor gypsy boy. I wander all over the world, singing my songs, playing my guitar. The people, they give me money—not much, but enough—

PRINCESS. Ah! Were there many people outside the wall listening to you?

ZAMI. No—ah, no! In the *daytime* I play for the people—but at night, when the Lady Moon is shining in the sky, then I sing to her. But I have never before sung to any one so beautiful as you, lady.

PRINCESS. And I have never seen any one like you. When you play and sing, I forget all my sorrows.

ZAMI. If I make you happy, lady, that is better than all the money in the world. But tell me, have you never before seen a gypsy boy?

PRINCESS. Alas! I have never even been outside the castle wall.

ZAMI [*starting up*]. The castle wall! Is—is this a *royal* garden? Are you—a—*Princess*?

PRINCESS [*sighing*]. Yes, I am a Princess, and this is the royal garden. [ZAMI *starts toward wall*.] Zami—gypsy boy—do not go away!

ZAMI. A Princess! A royal garden! Poor Zami, he would play no more songs if he were found here!

PRINCESS. Please, oh, please do not go away! This is my very own garden, and no one but my servants ever comes here—and I am so lonely, so unhappy—

ZAMI. It is very strange, indeed, that a Princess should beg a favor of a gypsy boy. Command, your Highness, and Zami stays.

PRINCESS. Then I *do* command. Stay here with me always and you shall have everything you wish—money, jewels, beautiful robes. Will you stay always, Zami?

ZAMI [*gently*]. Your Highness, no. I cannot. I am a gypsy boy—I must be free like the little wild creatures in the wood. All day long I must wander wherever I choose, and at night lie down to sleep under the open sky.

PRINCESS. Oh, but could nothing else make you happy, Zami?

ZAMI. Only one thing could make me more happy, and that you cannot give, for you are a Princess.

PRINCESS. But I could give you anything in the world. Tell me what it is.

ZAMI. If you were not a Princess—if you were only a little beggar maid, I would tell you that I love you. I would

take your hand in mine, and we should wander the whole world over, singing and dancing for the people—

PRINCESS. But when the moon was shining in the sky, then you would sing to me— Oh, Zami, take me with you—take me with you!

ZAMI [*joyously*]. Lady! You would come with me? With Zami, the poor gypsy boy?

PRINCESS. For ever and ever!

ZAMI [*kneeling and kissing her hand*]. Then I do say it! I love you—most beautiful lady! I love you! Come, take my hand, and we will go over the wall and far, far away. [*Springing to his feet and holding out hand for her as he turns to look up at the moon.*] Ah, Lady Moon, you are my sweetheart no longer!

PRINCESS [*tries to rise and then falls back, weeping and moaning*]. Oh—I forgot—I forgot—I cannot come. I forgot the wicked spell!

ZAMI. Lady, dear lady, what is it? Why do you weep?

PRINCESS. I cannot go with you, because I cannot walk. [*Weeps.*]

ZAMI. You—cannot—walk?

PRINCESS. Because of a wicked spell, put upon me when I was a baby, I have never taken a single step by myself. When you came, I was so happy that for the first time in my life I forgot my sorrow—now it all comes back again!

ZAMI. Lady—lady—it breaks my heart!

PRINCESS [*pleading*]. Zami, stay here with me?

ZAMI [*sadly*]. I cannot, lady. I am like the little wild bird—if you put me in a cage, I die. No, I must go far, far away. All day I shall dance and sing, but my heart will be ever sad because you are not with me. Lady—good-by—good-by. [*Exit very sadly. Song is heard.*]

Lady Moon, Lady Moon,
Wilt thou be my bride?
For I must sing a merry tune,
My aching heart to hide.

PRINCESS [*stretching out arms after him*]. Zami!—Oh!— [*Throws herself down and weeps. Enter TIMA upper left with crystal pipe.*]

TIMA [*out of breath*]. Your Highness, forgive me, but the crystal pipe had been mislaid, and we had to search the whole castle. But here it is at last.

PRINCESS. Crystal pipe? What crystal pipe? I sent you for no pipe.

TIMA [*astounded*]. Why, your Highness, it is the crystal pipe given to you by the Fairy Godmother at your birthday feast. You sent me to the castle for it not half an hour ago.

PRINCESS [*fiercely*]. Give it to me! What do I care for a crystal pipe? Why did not my Fairy Godmother break the wicked spell? [*Throws pipe against the wall.*] There! Break in a thousand pieces! [*As the pipe breaks, a noise*

like thunder is heard, and the great gate swings open. Enter the FAIRY GODMOTHER. She carries a white wand.]

FAIRY GODMOTHER. What is your wish, your Highness?

PRINCESS [*frightened*]. Oh—who are you?

FAIRY GODMOTHER. I am your Fairy Godmother who gave you the crystal pipe. I have been waiting all these



years for the pipe to be broken, for it had been decreed that, when the crystal pipe was broken, the wicked spell that has been over you all these years should be taken away.

PRINCESS. Godmother! You mean I can *walk*?

FAIRY GODMOTHER. As soon as I touch you with this wand you will be able to walk and run like other little girls.

PRINCESS. Oh, then—touch me quickly!

FAIRY GODMOTHER. But first you must make a choice. The little fairies of the air that hear everything mortals say have told me that you would rather be a beggar maid



who could walk than a Princess who had to be carried like a baby. If I touch you with my wand, you must become a beggar maid, and Tima shall become Princess in your stead. Think well, and choose.

PRINCESS. Nay, I need not think longer. Let me walk, dear godmother.

TIMA. Oh, your Highness! [FAIRY GODMOTHER *touches*

PRINCESS *with wand*. As she rises to her feet, her beautiful robe slips off, showing an old gray dress, and the FAIRY GODMOTHER removes her crown.]

PRINCESS. Why—why—I can stand! I can walk—and run—and dance— Oh, Tima! [*She takes both of TIMA's hands, and they whirl round and round. The FAIRY GODMOTHER picks up robe and crown, and as they stop, places them over TIMA's arm.*]

TIMA. Your Highness—godmother—I know not what to do or say.

PRINCESS. Go quickly to the castle and put on beautiful robes—but first, kiss me for the last time.

FAIRY GODMOTHER. Yes, Tima—I mean [*bowing low*] your Highness—go. [*Exit TIMA, upper left, with robe and crown.*] And now, your Highness, I mean little beggar girl, what will you do?

PRINCESS. First of all, thank you, dear godmother, for your kind help—and then I will run as fast as I can to find my true love. Zami, Zami, I am coming! [*She runs out center. As she goes, the WATER SPRITE and TREE NYMPH steal in, calling.*]

TREE NYMPH and WATER SPRITE. Fairy Queen, Fairy Queen!

FAIRY GODMOTHER. Come in, my children.

TREE NYMPH. Oh, lovely Queen, we have heard such strange things!

WATER SPRITE. Oh, very strange!

TREE NYMPH. But my little leaves shook so with excitement they could not tell me what was happening.

WATER SPRITE. Dear Fairy Queen, tell us, has the spell been broken?

FAIRY GODMOTHER. I will tell you all—but hush! Some one is coming. Take me to some fairy hollow, and there you shall hear the wondrous story of the Princess and her crystal pipe.

TREE NYMPH. This way, dear Queen. [*Exeunt all three, lower right. Enter ZAMI through gate.*]

ZAMI. Lady—my lady! Gone! And the great gate open! [*Trumpet is heard.*] Ah, now she comes. [*He runs to corner of garden and waits. Enter TIMA in Princess's attire and accompanied by the guardsmen. She is very haughty and the entrance is made in comic solemnity. ZAMI rushes out.*] Lady! I am come back to you! But you walk! What has happened?

TIMA. Well, sir, who are you? I never saw you before. Servants, I wish to be carried on the litter. [*They march in comic dignity to the litter, and TIMA sits on it. They lift her, and ZAMI rushes to the front and kneels.*]

ZAMI. Ah, if you be not my lady—I must have been dreaming—but no, your eyes, your hair, your very face is different. Tell me, oh, where shall I find my lady, the Princess who could not walk?



OH, ZAMI! I HAVE FOUND YOU AT LAST!

TIMA [*kindly*]. That I do not know, for she has gone out into the great world to seek her true love. The spell has been broken, and she has been turned into a little beggar girl, and I am the Princess in her stead. Servants! To the castle! [*Exeunt new Princess and guardsmen very proudly.*]

ZAMI. Gone to seek her true love! Why—I am her true love—I, Zami, the gypsy boy. I will find her if I must seek the whole world over. Lady—my lady—I am coming! [*As he starts to run out, the little beggar girl enters.*]

PRINCESS. Zami—oh, Zami! I have found you at last.

ZAMI. Dear lady—oh, I am so happy I cannot speak!

PRINCESS. When the spell was broken, I ran after you, but I could find you nowhere, and my heart was more sorrowful than ever before.

ZAMI. But now we have found each other, and we shall never part again. Dear lady, come! [*With arms about each other's waists they wander out of the garden, and ZAMI is heard singing.*]

Lady Moon, Lady Moon,

Thou wilt never be my bride,

But I'll sing thee a song with a merry tune

As we roam o'er the country-side.

[*Enter the FIREFLY. He is shaking with uncontrollable laughter.*]

FIREFLY. Ha, ha, ho, ho, ho! Oh, dearie me! If those silly fairies knew what I know! [*Enter the TREE NYMPH and WATER SPRITE.*]



TREE NYMPH *and* WATER SPRITE. Well, what do you know?

FIREFLY [*triumphantly*]. All about the Princess and the crystal pipe!

TREE NYMPH. So do we, slowpoke! The Queen of Fairies told us all about it.

WATER SPRITE. But, Firefly—would you, could you, tell us now just what you meant by “Very—like—it—may”?

FIREFLY [*very wisely*]. Well, if you really want to know—come close, both of you. [*All three stand in center stage close to footlights.*] No matter whether you are children, or grown-ups, or princesses, if you want something to happen very, very much, if you wish long enough and hard enough and often enough, why, remember what all Fireflies say [*blinking his light*]: Very—like—it—may!

CURTAIN

THE KING'S COBBLER
A PLAY IN TWO SCENES

CHARACTERS

CALEB, *the cobbler.*

HILDA, *his wife.*

OLD OLAF, *a broom-maker.*

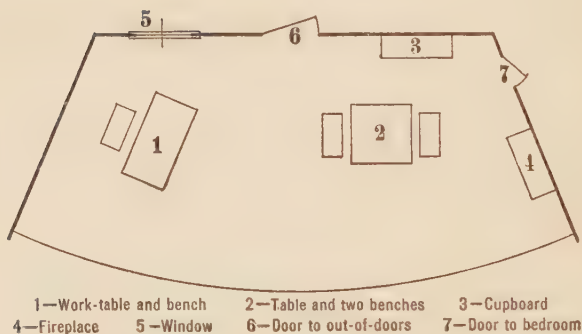
THE WAYFARER (*Prince Eifrid*).

THE LADY (*Little Astrid*).

NIELS, *a serving-man of the mayor's household.*

PLACE. *A country far across the sea.*

SCENE. *The cobbler's house.*



THE KING'S COBBLER

SCENE I

A rough peasant interior with a door at center back to out-of-doors; at the right of the door is a casement window; at the left, a small cupboard for dishes, etc. There is another door up left leading to the bedroom, and an open grate down left with a large iron kettle over the fire. A work-table and bench at right center are so placed that the cobbler may look out of the window easily when seated at the table. Another table at left center with benches right and left of it. Although the furnishings are meager, the room itself is scrupulously clean, and a note of color is introduced by bright calico curtains at the window and on the cupboard, and a wood fire in the grate.

As the curtain rises, CALEB is discovered seated at his work-table on which are tools, scraps of leather, thread, and some shoes and boots to be repaired. He is at work on the sole of a little red boot, the mate of which stands on the floor beside his bench. As he finishes the boot, he takes a cloth and rubs it clean.

CALEB. There now, you little red boots, you are as good as new again. [*Puts boot on floor and takes up other boot, cleaning it likewise while he talks, pausing now and then to give special attention to some particularly stubborn spot.*] And how you will hop and skip from morning to night—wherever your pretty little mistress takes it in her head to go. Skip and hop, and hop and skip! Oh, I can see you now, twinkling along over the snow as merry as ever you please. Yes, you are as good as new. These soles are of strong leather, and there is not a broken stitch anywhere. And what is best of all, your mistress will come for you today and pay me—let me see—soles and heels and stitching. Ah, well, we will let the stitching go. Three kroner, then, she will pay me. [*He rises, takes a bit of chalk from the table and writes a large "three" on the sole of one of the boots, which he places at the left end of the table. He then takes up a large shoe that is sadly worn and misshapen.*] Now then, old grandfather, what is to be done to you? [*He sits again to examine the shoe as a little bell over the door rings cheerily.*] Come in, come in whoever you be, and welcome. [*The door opens, and OLD OLAF enters, carrying two or three fagot brooms. He is heavily wrapped and wears a bright woolen muffler and mittens. He seems very cold and slaps himself soundly with his free hand, while CALEB jumps up to close the door and to take the brooms, which he stands against the wall.*]

OLAF [*grumbling*]. Little fathers! How the cold does strike to my poor old bones!

CALEB. Welcome, good Olaf, welcome! Come, warm yourself by the fire. [*Takes stool from left of table and places it near the fire.*] And how have you fared today?

OLAF [*coming to fire and warming himself, while CALEB stirs up the coals*]. You may well ask me that. Look there at my brooms. [*He takes off cap and mittens and loosens scarf as he sits.*]

CALEB [*going to examine brooms*]. And fine good brooms they are, too, Old Olaf.

OLAF. And why should they not be so? Did I not gather every twig of them myself and bind them together with stout rushes? But who cares for that! I tell you I was the first to sing out my wares in the market-place this morning. There I stood all day in the cold and only one broom did I sell. Oh, it is hard to be a poor man!

CALEB. Well, it is something to sell one broom.

OLAF [*disgusted and complaining*]. Little fathers! To stand out in the cold and see the fine ladies and gentlemen ride by in their coaches all snug and warm. Nothing to do but eat and be merry and enjoy themselves all day long.

CALEB [*going to work-table and taking up his work*]. Ah, well, you have sold one broom and that means you had enough money to buy half a loaf of bread and a steaming pot of broth. Now you sit warming yourself at the

fire, and tonight you will sleep in a comfortable bed, so that is not too bad after all, my friend, eh?

OLAF [*whining*]. It is all very well for you to say so, but what is half a loaf and a pot of broth when one has to work one's life away to earn it? And what will my son and his wife say when I tell them I had to spend all that I earned and have brought no money home with me?

CALEB. Will they be so angry with you for that?

OLAF. Humph! No doubt they will turn me out in the cold—that is what they will do. Oh, it's bitter hard to be poor, so it is.

CALEB [*still working busily*]. Well, then, Old Olaf, I'll tell you what, you shall share my good fortune today.

OLAF [*greedily*]. Eh? How is that?

CALEB. See these little red boots? [*He rises, comes to front of work-table, and holds up the boots, stroking them gently and with evident pride.*] Whose would they be, do you think?

OLAF [*coming to examine boots*]. Humph! It's easy to see they come from the rich folk, it is. We poor ones be glad enough for anything to keep out the cold without wasting money on foolishness.

CALEB. Ay, rich folk indeed. They belong to the mayor's daughter—and a sweeter or better little lady there never was!

OLAF [*awed*]. The mayor's daughter!

CALEB. Ay, Little Astrid—and today she will come for them and pay me three kroner. It is not often I have such fine work to do, and such fine callers. [*He replaces the boots and sits again to work.*]

OLAF [*dropping in amazement on stool right of table*].



Do you tell me, Master Caleb, that the mayor's daughter will come here to fetch away her own boots? [CALEB *nods.*] And her father has near as many servingmen as a king to do his bidding.

CALEB [*proudly*]. I am telling you she will come herself. Many's the time she has sat on the bench before the fire there watching me work, and telling me and my good wife, Hilda, tales learned out of her books. [*Sighing.*]

Often have my wife and I wished that the good God had blessed us with such a little one.

OLAF. They be all well enough when they be little ones. But when they be grown, they be hard enough on us old ones. [*Beginning to complain again.*] But what was it you said a little time ago about sharing your good fortune with me? Have you forgotten you said that, Cobbler Caleb?

CALEB. Why, so I had, Old Olaf. The thought of Little Astrid put everything else out of my mind.

OLAF [*anxiously*]. But you will keep your promise? And you have not told me what luck it was that came your way. What is it you will share with me?

CALEB. Why, since I am to be paid three kroner for the boots today, I will buy one of your brooms for my wife, and then you can go home to your son's house with money in your pockets. What do you say to that, eh?

OLAF [*plainly disappointed*]. That is better than nothing, to be sure. But it is not such great fortune to sell one broom—besides, the mayor's daughter has not come with the money and it will soon be as black as pitch. I am so poor I have no lantern and it is a long dark walk through the woods at night.

CALEB [*good-naturedly*]. Well, well, old fellow, you are hard to please. But [*looking out of window*] you are right. It's night before you can believe it these winter months. [*Growing anxious.*] And Little Astrid is very

late, certainly. I pray no harm has come to her. But no, there is nothing to worry about. My good Hilda has not come home yet, either. All the same, I will light a candle and put it in the window. [*He goes to cupboard for candle and lights it from the fire.*]

OLAF. Then what about me? I suppose I must start along without the money after all. Little fathers, but it's hard never to have any good luck! [*Gets up and puts on cap and mittens and tightens scarf, but watches CALEB, who has taken the candle to the table and is placing it near the window.*]

CALEB [*a little hesitantly*]. If you must go now—then I'll tell you what I will do. I have one krone here in the house. It is the only money we have, but I will give it you for a broom. [*Reassuring himself.*] The little lady is certain to come for her boots before long. So wait a moment here while I get the money. [*Exit CALEB to bedroom. OLD OLAF peers about the room, sees cupboard, goes to it, and steals from one of the shelves a half loaf of bread, which he conceals under his cloak.*]

OLAF [*slyly*]. I may as well have this. After all, three kroner is a great deal of money, so the cobbler can buy more bread whenever he wants to. Besides, in this world, one has to take what one can get. [*He chuckles wickedly, and then quickly assumes his innocent manner as CALEB reënters.*]

CALEB. Here is the money then—and may it bring you a little happiness. The world is really not such a bad place, Old Olaf, if only one remembers to be grateful for what one has.

OLAF [*clutching money and slipping it into his mitten*]. It is easy for you to be grateful when such good fortune comes to you, but it is not so fine for a poor old fellow like me. But I must go now, Cobbler Caleb, so I will say good-night to you. [*He takes up all the brooms and starts to go quickly.*]

CALEB. Ay, but my broom, good Olaf, my broom! You are forgetting to leave one of the brooms for me.

OLAF [*reluctantly taking out the poorest and smallest one, which he stands against the wall*]. And little enough do I earn by selling it. Good-night, then.

CALEB. Good-night to you, and a safe journey through the wood. [*Exit OLAF. CALEB watches him for a moment then closes the door, shivering.*] How cold it has grown! And how late Hilda and Little Astrid are. [*The chimes in the church tower ring out clearly. CALEB bows his head, crossing himself.*] May the good God keep watch over his children tonight. [*He goes to the work-table and is about to start again on the old shoe, as the door opens and HILDA enters. She carries a little market basket on one arm and a fagot broom under the other.*]

So there you are at last!

HILDA. Ay, Caleb, and cold enough, too. Quick, let me set down my basket and broom and get near to the fire. My hands are almost frozen. [*She puts the basket on the*



table and the broom against it, drops her shawl on bench, and goes to seat at fire. CALEB eyes her broom curiously and compares it with the one against the wall.] And such crowds there were in the market-place today! I never saw so many coaches all filled with ladies in velvet and furs,

and fine gentlemen in handsome uniforms. Some say there were nobles from the king's court among them. Oh, it was a grand sight. The coachmen swinging their long whips and the horses prancing and dancing in the snow. And the mayor's coach, Caleb, was grander than any.

CALEB [*looking up quickly*]. The mayor's coach!

HILDA. And the mayor himself in his great ermine cloak.

CALEB [*eagerly*]. And Little Astrid, then. She was there, too?

HILDA. Ay, she was there too, bowing and smiling as sweet as ever you saw. Oh, it was surely a grand sight, Caleb.

CALEB. And so it must have been. But for all that, Hilda, I ask nothing better than to see her sitting there before the fire swinging her little feet to and fro, while she watches me patch the boots.

HILDA. Yes, you are right. The little dear! No one would ever guess, to see her here in the cobbler's house, that she was such a great lady.

CALEB. I am glad enough that you saw her today, for she was to come for her boots and I feared some harm had befallen her. I put the candle in the window here when the dark came. [*He takes candle, places it nearer center of table, and sets to work once more.*]

HILDA [*a little wearily*]. Ah, well, I must get the supper ready. [*She rises, goes toward table and sees the two*

brooms.] Why, wherever did this broom come from? I brought only one with me from the market-place.

CALEB. I am afraid you will be angry with me, Hilda, for I paid our last krone for that broom, and now you have bought another one. But I could not help myself—I really could not. He was such a poor old fellow.

HILDA. Oh, Caleb, if you go on this way we shall soon have nothing to live on. You have paid ten times what the broom is worth. Why, see, it is not even as good as this one I bought from Old Olaf!

CALEB. Olaf? Now that really was too bad of him, not to tell me you had bought a broom from him.

HILDA. Caleb! You are not telling me it was Old Olaf you gave our last krone to?

CALEB [*a little sad*]. Ay, Hilda.

HILDA. See now, that is what comes of being so kind-hearted to every one. It was not an hour ago that I bought this broom, and then, before I can fetch it home, that sly old fellow comes here and sells you another one—and now we have no money at all!

CALEB [*cheerful again*]. Ah, well, never mind that. Tomorrow Little Astrid will certainly come for her boots and then we shall have money enough for all our needs. Come, let us forget all about it and eat our supper.

HILDA. We have nothing much to eat. There is bread and porridge and this bit of cheese. [*Taking cheese from*

basket.] Stir up the fire again while I get the dishes. [CALEB does as she bids. HILDA places the two brooms in the corner above the work-table. She sighs deeply, and looking at CALEB who still kneels before the fire, shakes her head despairingly. She takes the shawl from the bench and carries it to the other room. As she does so, CALEB goes to the work-table for candle, sees brooms, and stands looking at them ruefully. HILDA reënters, goes to cupboard, and takes out bowls into which she dips porridge from the kettle over the fire. She goes again to cupboard for bread and cries out in surprise.] Where is my half loaf of bread? Surely you have not given that away as well?

CALEB [*coming to table with candle*]. That I have not.

HILDA. Then where can it have gone to? Has any one been here?

CALEB. No one at all—no one except Old Olaf.

HILDA [*angrily*]. Oh! Then he has stolen the bread too. It isn't enough that he deceives you into giving him all our money, but he even takes the last bit of bread in the house. Now we have nothing but porridge and a bit of cheese for our supper.

CALEB. Ah, well, never mind, Hilda. We shall get along very well as it is. There is nothing so tasty as good hot porridge on a cold winter night. Come, let us give thanks and eat while it is still hot. [*They sit at the table, HILDA left, CALEB right. Both fold their hands and bow their heads.*

Footsteps are heard outside followed by the tinkle of the bell. Both lift their heads quickly and listen.] Who is there?

NIELS. It is Niels, with a message from the mayor's daughter.

CALEB [*joyfully, as he goes to door*]. Now, my good Hilda, what did I tell you? We shall have the money today after all, and tomorrow you can go to market again. [*Opens door. Enter NIELS.*] Come in, my good lad. [*Going to table for red boots.*] I know what it is you have come for and here they are, all ready and as good as new.

NIELS [*proudly*]. Nay, Master Cobbler! I came for no boots, but to tell you that the mayor's daughter has been taken away to the king's palace.

CALEB and HILDA [*astonished*]. Little Astrid! To the king's palace!

NIELS. And she will be the playfellow of the little princess, who has led a sad lonely life of it since the death of the queen.

CALEB [*dazed, and looking at boots in his hand*]. But her boots—these little red boots I have mended for her . . .

NIELS. She will have little use for them now, I can tell you—living in the king's palace. But for all that she bade me tell you she was grieved not to see you once more. And as for the boots, you are to promise to keep them safe, and

one day she will come for them herself, she said. So good-night, Cobbler Caleb. I must hurry back to the great feast my master has ordered to celebrate his daughter's good



fortune. Do not forget, you are to keep the boots until she comes for them. [*Exit* NIELS.]

CALEB [*wistfully*]. Until she comes for them. Ay, good lad. [*He puts the boots down gently on the work-table.*]

HILDA [*coming to center*]. She will *never* come for them. She will forget us. And now what do you say?

Cheated of our last krone, robbed of our bread, and now those boots left on your hands with no pay for all the fine work you have put in them. Oh, whatever is to become of us? [*Drops on bench and begins to cry.*]

CALEB. Ah, Hilda, we can manage about the money. There will be other boots to mend, but—never to see Little Astrid again; never to hear her little feet come tap, tap, tapping along, or see her merry little face at the window there—that would be the greatest loss of all. But she will keep her promise. She is good and sweet and kind. Some day she will come back—she will come back for her little red boots. [*He touches them caressingly as the church bells ring.*] Hark, Hilda, the bells! [*HILDA rises, and they stand facing each other at center with folded hands and bowed heads as the bells ring softly on.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Ten years later. The scene is the same, except that there is a general air of poverty about the room. The fire is but a mere flicker, and the window, bare of curtains, has snow in little heaps at every muntin. Outside the wind blows furiously. Only the little red boots on

CALEB's *table look bright and new, as if they had been polished every day since LITTLE ASTRID went away and left them there.*

HILDA *is discovered seated on the bench near the fire, toward which she constantly bends closer to see the stitches in her knitting.*

HILDA [*fretfully, as she loses another stitch*]. Ay, ay! Slip off the needle, then. My poor old hands are so stiff and cold I can scarce knit once across without losing a stitch. [*Drawing her shawl closer about her.*] How cold it is. I hope Caleb comes soon with more fagots. [*Loses another stitch.*] Ah, well, it is no use to knit any more—I shall have to ravel this all out again. I'll wait until it's time to light the candle though, so I can see what I'm about. [*She puts the knitting on top of the cupboard, and drawing shawl about her shoulders, goes to the window and peers out into the gathering darkness.*] Yes, there he comes—though it is so dark I can hardly see him. [*Turns from window to the work-table and sighs.*] Poor Caleb! How little the world repays all his kindness. He has always shared whatever we had with any one who came this way in need. Now we are old and in need ourselves, but no one thinks of that. [*Dries her eyes on corner of her apron. The bell over the door rings impatiently, and HILDA starts in surprise.*] Mercy on us! It is so long since any one has pulled

the bellcord I had almost forgotten it was there. Caleb must have such a load of fagots that he cannot open the door. [*Goes to door as quickly as she can. The bell rings again.*] Ay, ay! I am coming. [*Opens the door.*]

WAYFARER. Well, well, old one, you are slow enough about opening the door, to be sure. Br-r-r-r! What a night! [*Comes into room and shakes off snow, stamping his feet to warm them. He is well dressed and carries himself with distinction.*] I'll just warm myself at your fire, though it's a feeble one at best. [*Goes to fire.*]

HILDA [*plainly awed by his manner and appearance*]. You must excuse me. It was so dark I could not see, and I thought you were my husband coming home with a bundle of wood. Have you lost your way, good sir?

WAYFARER. Nay, I have come from the inn to search for a certain place and as I was not sure how much farther I had to travel I decided to stop at the next house I came to so that I could warm myself and make inquiries. But there is little enough heat from this fire. I believe my hands are almost frozen.

HILDA. My husband will be here soon, sir, and he will gladly help you find the place you are looking for. As for the fire, it is the best I can give you until he comes with the wood.

WAYFARER. Is your husband a wood-cutter, then?

HILDA. Nay, sir, he is a cobbler.

WAYFARER. A cobbler! [*Aside.*] That is strange. I must question her a bit. [*To HILDA.*] Then why does he not spend his time mending boots so that he can buy his wood from a wood-cutter?

HILDA. Alas, good sir, no one brings him any boots to mend nowadays.

WAYFARER. Why is that? Surely people must need warm boots in such weather as this. I'll wager he did his work poorly. That is the reason they no longer bring their work to him, eh?

HILDA [*proudly*]. Ah, sir, you are a stranger here, it is easy to see that.

WAYFARER. I am a stranger here, it is true. But how did you know that?

HILDA. You say people do not bring their boots here because they were poorly mended, but there is no one who can do finer work—no one.

WAYFARER. Then it is strange that you live here in such poverty. It is bare and cold enough for one to freeze to death. [*Huddles closer to fire.*] You had better come nearer to the fire yourself.

HILDA. Nay, it has grown so dark I must light the candle and set it in the window, else Caleb will lose his way in the storm.

WAYFARER [*turning quickly to her as she mentions CALEB's name*]. Caleb? Did you say Caleb?

HILDA [*going to fire, lights candle and carries it to table near window, sighing as she speaks*]. Ay, sir, that is my husband's name. Caleb the cobbler they used to call him.

WAYFARER [*excited*]. But, my good woman, then this is the very place— [*Looks about the room as if in search of something.*] And there are the little red boots themselves—but I must be careful! I have almost told my secret.

HILDA [*who has not heard what he said*]. What is it you were saying? I did not hear.

WAYFARER [*speaking casually, but really watching her closely*]. I was merely about to inquire why you say they used to call him Caleb the cobbler? What does he do now, if he no longer works at his trade. Come, sit down over here and tell me about it. [*Indicating the bench at right of table.*]

HILDA. Nay, I must get my knitting and sit here by the candle. I cannot see to work by the fire light. [*She goes for knitting and carries it with her to bench behind work-table, where she sits and begins to take out the bad stitches.*]

WAYFARER. What a fine pair of red boots you have there! I should like very much to buy them. What will you sell them for?

HILDA [*putting down knitting and looking at boots sadly*]. Alas, sir, they are not new boots. They have been patched.

WAYFARER. Ah, then your husband still works at his trade, it seems. And no doubt the owner of the boots will come for them soon.

HILDA. Nay, good sir. I do not expect any one to come for them. [*Sighing.*]

WAYFARER. Then, if that is so, you can have no objection to selling them. Come, how much will you take?

HILDA. Alas, they are not for sale.

WAYFARER [*pretending surprise*]. Not for sale? First you tell me your husband is out of work, then you say you do not expect any one to come for those boots—and yet you will not sell them. Surely you can have no use for them, and I would pay a good sum for them, too.

HILDA. Ah, sir, I would gladly sell them, for indeed we are so poor that we have barely enough food for our supper tonight, and we no longer know from one day to the next how we are to live. But my husband never gives up hope that Little Astrid will one day come for her boots.

WAYFARER [*aside*]. "Little" Astrid! And she is the stateliest and most beautiful lady in the whole court.

HILDA. What is that you say? You must speak louder for I cannot always hear what is said to me.

WAYFARER. I was just asking about Little Astrid, as you call her. Why does she not come for her boots? Perhaps she does not know they are ready for her.

HILDA. Alas, sir, they have been ready for nearly ten

years. The day she was to come for them, she went away instead.

WAYFARER. But did she leave no message about her boots?

HILDA. Ay, she said that one day she would come for them, and Caleb promised he would keep them safe until she came. Every day he polishes them as carefully as if he had just finished them, and whenever he comes in the house, he says, "Has any one been here today?" But she is like all the others. She has forgotten us too.

WAYFARER [*gently*]. And the poor fellow has kept his promise all these years when he might have sold them to some one!

HILDA. Ay, there have been many who would have paid a good price for them, but Caleb would always say, "I am sorry, but they are not for sale."

WAYFARER [*coming to table and examining boots*]. I never saw a finer bit of stitching. There is no doubt about that. They look as good as new. Surely the people do not know good work when they see it, or they would bring their boots here for repairing.

HILDA [*sighing*]. Ah, my Caleb had two strong hands when he mended those!

WAYFARER. What do you mean by that? Has he not two hands now?

HILDA. Ay, two hands, but one of them is of no use to

him. Poor Caleb! For every good deed in this world, he has been paid by some ill fortune. It was because of Old Olaf that he lost the use of his hand.



WAYFARER [*now deeply interested*]. How was that?

HILDA. The broom-maker lost his way in the woods, and Caleb went with the others to search for him. It was a stormy winter night, as cold as this one, and the wind was blowing so hard that the trees were snapping and cracking. They found Old Olaf almost frozen to death under a

tree, so they picked him up and carried him home. But when they had gone a little way, Caleb ran back to fetch the brooms that had been left behind, and a great limb from one of the trees fell on him. They thought it had surely killed him, but no, it was only his arm that was hurt. . . .

WAYFARER. So! The poor fellow.

HILDA. At first the people were sorry for him and brought their boots to him just the same, but it took him so long to do the work with one hand that they soon grew tired of waiting for him. Now they never come any more. They take their boots to the new cobbler who is young and quick with his fingers—but [*proudly*] no one can do as fine work as my Caleb—no one. Ah, if only Little Astrid would come back, now—but no, she has forgotten us. She will never come back.

WAYFARER. Who knows? Perhaps she will come to-night. But it is growing very late. And I must hurry back to my friends at the inn or they will think I have lost my way. Besides, I think I know how to find the place I was looking for, so I will not wait for your husband after all. Good-night, then, and may good fortune come to you soon.

HILDA. I pray God it may. Good-night to you, sir. [*Exit the WAYFARER. HILDA picks up her knitting, and sighing, carries it back to the cupboard. While her back is turned*

to the door, it is opened carefully and the WAYFARER tiptoes into the room, takes the boots from the table, and hurries out, closing the door again as she goes to poke up the fire.] How late Caleb is! I'll just sit here by the fire till he comes. *[She draws the bench closer to the fire, drops down wearily, and leans her head against the wall. Wrapping her shawl closely about her, she falls into a fitful doze. There is a pause during which is heard the whistling of the wind and the beating of the snow against the window panes. Presently CALEB's bent figure is seen to pass the window. He carries an armful of wood, and as he stamps the snow from his heavy boots, he shouts.]*

CALEB. Hilda! Open the door!

HILDA *[coming to with a start]*. Eh? Who's there?

CALEB. Open the door for me, Hilda. I have my arm full of wood.

HILDA. Ay, Caleb. I'm coming. *[Takes candle, goes to door and opens it.]* Come in, then, you must be nearly frozen.

CALEB. Ay, that I am. It's a bitter cold night. *[He goes to the fireplace and puts down the wood. HILDA places the candle on the table and helps CALEB out of his wraps, from which she shakes the snow while he puts some sticks on the fire and stands warming himself. His right arm hangs motionless at his side.]* God pity all travelers this

night! [*Hesitantly.*] I suppose no one came today? One could hardly expect any one on such a day.

HILDA. Ay, there was a stranger, but he only wanted to seek shelter from the storm.

CALEB. Ah, I thought perhaps—but she would not come on such a day.

HILDA. And, Caleb, he wanted to buy the red boots. . . .

CALEB. No, no, Hilda! Never that! You must not say that! We must never give the red boots to any one but Little Astrid. Never forget that, Hilda—she said she would come for them one day, and I have kept them for her all these years. Ah, yes, I will keep my promise and the good God will not forget us, Hilda.

HILDA [*impatiently*]. Ah, but all the same, Caleb, *she* has forgotten us long since. Your Little Astrid is no doubt a fine lady now. What should she care for a pair of red boots she could not even wear?

CALEB [*realizing slowly the truth of her words*]. Do you know, Hilda, I always think of her as the little girl. Why—she is a grown woman now, she is.

HILDA [*pleadingly*]. Then you will sell the boots, Caleb? Just think, tomorrow we can start out early in the morning. We will go to the inn and find the stranger who was here tonight. He will pay a good sum for the boots.

He said they were finer than any boots he had ever seen.

CALEB [*still standing by the fire into which he gazes dreamily*]. I am glad of that, Hilda. For there is nothing too good for Little Astrid—Little Astrid who is not a little girl any more. But for all that, some day she will come tap, tap, tapping along—she will pull the bellcord, and call out “Master Caleb, I have kept my promise. I have come for my little red boots.” You can see for yourself how it is. I am sorry, but they are not for sale. Now I must go polish them. [*Starting to work-table.*] Yes, they must look as bright as new when she . . . [*Discovers they are not on table.*] Hilda! Hilda! Where are they? Where have you put them?

HILDA [*astonished*]. What are you saying?

CALEB [*looking all about the room in growing alarm*]. The boots, Hilda—the boots. They are not here. What have you done with them?

HILDA [*wringing her hands and looking about helplessly*]. Where can they have gone to? They were there this afternoon I tell you, for the stranger was saying he would pay a good sum for them. . . . [*A thought comes to both of them at the same time, and they look at each other in silence. HILDA is the first to speak.*] Caleb, the stranger! Since we would not sell the boots, he has stolen them!

CALEB [*scarcely able to understand that they are*

gone]. Gone! I have kept them for her all these years, and she never came. Now, Hilda, they are gone, and she will come for them—she will say, “Master Caleb, I have come for my little . . .” Oh, Hilda, I cannot bear that! To have her come, and not find them there. Come, come [*going to bench and feverishly throwing his cloak about him*], we must go at once. We must find him—we must find him. [*Horses and the sound of sleigh bells are heard outside and a loud “Whoa!” Footsteps are heard hurrying to door, and the bell rings. HILDA looks at CALEB in fright.*]

HILDA. Caleb! If it should be . . .

CALEB. Ah, no, no. It cannot be. She must not come now—she must not come until we have found them and brought them back again. Go, Hilda, open the door.

HILDA [*going slowly*]. I am almost afraid . . . [*Bell rings again. She looks again in fright at CALEB, then quickly opens the door. The WAYFARER and a tall lady come quickly into the room. HILDA cries out joyfully.*] Caleb, it is the stranger come back again! Ah, good sir, what have you done with the boots?

WAYFARER. Well, my good woman, so your husband has come home at last.

CALEB [*coming to him and laying his hand pleadingly upon his arm*]. Sir, I pray you, if you took a pair of little red boots from my table there, give them back to me.

WAYFARER. But, my good fellow, this lady wishes to purchase the boots as a present for a little girl. I tried to buy them from your wife, but she dared not sell them, she said, so I just took them along with me when she was not looking. And now I have come to pay for them. How much will you take?

CALEB. No, no, my good sir. You do not understand. I must have them back again. You see, they do not belong to me.

WAYFARER. Come, now. What do you say to fifty kroner?

HILDA [*in awe*]. Fifty kroner! Caleb, that is more money than we have ever seen!

WAYFARER. Fifty kroner is a great deal of money. Now then, what do you say? [*The lady stands watching CALEB eagerly. HILDA, too, waits in fearful suspense.*]

CALEB [*goes to bench back of table and sits, speaking gently, and as if he had forgotten all about the money*]. You must give them back to me. I am sorry, but they are not for sale. [*HILDA sinks down upon the bench in despair, but the lady cries out in joy.*]

LADY (*Little Astrid*). I have won my wager! Eifrid, go quickly, and bring in the boots. [*WAYFARER goes out, as CALEB and HILDA look on in amazement. The lady throws back her veil, and flinging wide both arms, cries out to them.*] Hilda! Caleb! Do you not know me? It is I—it is



HILDA! CALEB! DO YOU NOT KNOW ME?

your Little Astrid come back again. [*Runs to CALEB and dropping upon her knees, takes his hand in hers.*] Ah, my dear old friend, you have been faithful to your Little Astrid all these years, and you shall have your reward at last.

CALEB [*laughing and crying at the same time, while HILDA, who has risen, stands as if stunned*]. Hilda! Why, see, it is—it is her very self! [*Patting her head which she has dropped upon his knee while she dabs at her eyes with her handkerchief.*] Why, there, there, my little one! My little pretty one! Old Caleb never doubted that you would come one day. . . . [*Bell rings.*]

ASTRID [*rising and going to HILDA and patting her arm in excitement*]. Quick, good Hilda, open the door. [*HILDA goes to door and opens it. The WAYFARER comes in with one boot in each hand. He carries them as if they were very heavy and as he sets them upon the floor they are seen to be filled with bright new gold pieces.*]

WAYFARER (*Eifrid*). There, Cobbler Caleb, are your boots, filled to the brim with gold. [*EIFRID and LITTLE ASTRID stand in center, back of the boots. CALEB and HILDA come and stand, one at each side, looking in amazement at the boots.*]

CALEB. But I do not understand. . . . What does it mean?

WAYFARER. It means that you are no longer a poor

cobbler. Listen, my good fellow, while I tell you how your honesty has been rewarded. First, you must hear that I am Prince Eifrid, the eldest son of the king and heir to the throne, and the Lady Astrid is my betrothed wife. [CALEB and HILDA start to kneel.] Nay, nay [*extending his hand and helping CALEB to rise*], it is I who should kneel to you. Hark, then. A few days ago, the king my father, in a moment of anger, declared there was not an honest tradesman in the whole kingdom. So the Lady Astrid wagered with him that a certain cobbler was so honest that if she were to go to his shop, she would still find the little red boots she had left there many years before. Then, the king declared that if the boots could be found, and if the man refused to part with them even though he were offered fifty kroner for them, they should be filled to the brim with gold, and the cobbler made first among his trade—Cobbler to the king! And so, my honest fellow, I am the first to salute you . . . Caleb, the king's cobbler!

ASTRID. And best of all, you need never fear again that your kindness to others who are poor and needy may leave you penniless yourselves, for the boots shall never be empty. I myself will come once every year, as long as you live, to fill them again. And now we must hasten to the king to tell him we have won the wager. Good-night, my old friend, and may God bless you and keep you both.

[CALEB and HILDA, too stunned to speak, stand looking first at each other and then at the gold-filled boots. ASTRID touches EIFRID on the arm and motions to the door, speaking softly.] Come, my dear, let us leave them quite alone. [EIFRID and ASTRID tiptoe out and close the door. Not



until the coachman's "Gee-up" and the merry tinkle of the sleigh bells are heard, do HILDA and CALEB move.]

HILDA [dropping on her knees and taking up handful of gold]. Caleb! See! It is not a dream. The boots are filled to the brim, and we are rich for the rest of our lives.

CALEB. Ay, Hilda. Little Astrid has come back. And we need never fear poverty again. But better than that, I have kept my promise—and the good God, He never for-

gets! [*Bells from the church begin to ring.*] Hark, Hilda, the bells! [*HILDA, still kneeling, bows her head, and CALEB, crossing himself, stands with closed eyes and lifted face, upon which is peace, and happiness, and utter content.*]

CURTAIN

THE GIFT OF LOVE
A NATIVITY PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

JACOB, *an old shepherd.*

TILON }
ZORI } *his sons.*

SARAH, *a kinswoman.*

OMAD, *a slave.*

THE THREE WISE MEN: MELCHIOR, CASPAR, BALTHAZAR.

THE VIRGIN.

JOSEPH.

SHEPHERDS.

THE INN SERVANT.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD (*voice*).

THE GIFT OF LOVE

SCENE I

Interior of a shepherd's cot near Bethlehem. There is a small window down left; opposite the window, down right, is a hearth on which a few coals give out a faint glow; an exit up right. The only furniture in the room is a small table up left, with benches or stools: one in back, and one at each end. In front of the grate is a low bench, a basket, and a pile of sheepskins used by the shepherds for protection from the chill night air.

At the rise of the curtain, JACOB and his two sons are discovered seated at the table. They have just finished their supper of porridge and goat's milk.

JACOB. My sons, we have been blessed with food and drink. Let us give thanks. [*They bow their heads a moment in silent prayer. JACOB rises and goes wearily to take his sheepskin from before the fire and wrap it about himself. TILON goes to the window and gazes out moodily, while ZORI, who has taken up a crutch from the floor beside his stool, hobbles about the table gathering up the bowls, which he leaves in a pile on the table, as JACOB starts toward the door.*]

ZORI [*coming toward his father*]. Wilt thou watch the flocks again tonight, my father?

JACOB. Ay. We watch again tonight.

TILON [*gloomily*]. Yet have we watched since dawn, and since the going down of the sun last eventide. My very bones ache within me.

JACOB. Tilon, my son, thou art young, and strong, and able. And I, who am old, feel yet within me the strength and vigor that cometh to those who dwell upon the hills. Shall we whom God hath so blessed break faith then with our kinsman who lieth sick of a fever? Shall we not keep his watch for him?

TILON [*reluctantly*]. Ay. But I could wish that our master had hired more shepherds to do labor for him. His be the greatest flock of sheep upon these hills—yet hath he fewer shepherds in his hire than any man. And we shall have but little thanks from him to pay us for our labor.

JACOB [*sternly and reprovingly*]. My son, thy words are as leaves blown in the wind. Shall we not have the thanks of our kinsman, and of his good wife, Sarah?

ZORI. And Tilon, the master hath been kind to us. Surely thou dost not forget my lamb—my dear little lamb the master allowed thee to bring to me. [*He goes to the hearth, takes up a basket, and holds it in his arms, looking down tenderly at the lamb in it.*]

TILON [*scornfully*]. Kind! It was sick, and crippled and

ugly. Verily, I wonder that it did not die ere I could fetch it home to thee. I think I never saw so poor a one before.

JACOB [*sharply*]. Tilon! Hast thou no thought for thy brother?

ZORI. Nay, my father! Be not angry with him. I—I mind it not. Indeed I think I love my little lamb the more because it is—even as I am [*indicating his crippled leg, wistfully*]. Ah, my little one, I would thou and I might watch the master's flocks for him, out there on the hills. [JACOB *places his arm protectingly about ZORI's shoulder.*]

JACOB. Then who would tend my house—build a fire to warm me when I am cold, and make porridge for me when I hunger? I tell thee thou art a great comfort to thy father. [*While his father has been speaking, TILON has gone to take his sheepskin from the floor and is sullenly drawing it about himself.*] Tilon, wait thou here till my return. I go to our kinsman's house to inquire if the fever hath left him. [TILON *drops the skin to the floor and stretches out upon it, looking into the fire.*]

ZORI [*eagerly*]. Oh, my father, if thou dost speak with our kinswoman Sarah, wilt thou ask from her the piece of fine white wood she hath saved for me? She hath promised it me these many days, and I would carve in it the likeness of my little lamb.

JACOB [*tenderly*]. Our kinswoman Sarah hath been so

full of care for her husband that I doubt not the promise hath been forgotten. Yet will I ask, my son.

ZORI [*softly*]. I thank thee, my father. [*He stands looking happily after his father, who goes to the door, turns back again as if to speak to TILON, then shakes his head in perplexity and goes out. TILON half rises, as if he too would speak, and then throws himself down again, his head in his arms. ZORI comes softly to the hearth, setting down the basket in the place from which he took it; looks wistfully down at TILON, and then hobbles back to the table. He takes up the porridge bowls and carries them to a cupboard concealed by the back curtain just above the door. As he does so, TILON stifles an involuntary groan. ZORI comes to center.*] Didst thou speak, Tilon?

TILON. Nay, I said nothing. [*Rising hastily.*]

ZORI [*hesitantly*]. 'Tilon—?

TILON. What wouldst thou? [*Sits on the bench, still looking in fire.*]

ZORI [*coming to center*]. Be not angry with me, Tilon. I know thou art weary with long watching—but our father groweth old, and I cannot bear to see him sorrow for thee.

TILON [*shortly*]. He hath no need to sorrow for me. Have I denied him aught?

ZORI [*comes impulsively to TILON and puts arm about*

his shoulder]. Nay—but thou art ever downcast, and thou hast never a smile or word of cheer.

TILON [*swinging about fiercely*]. Why should I not be downcast? [*Goes to window and looks out, speaking harshly.*] I hate the stillness and the loneliness out there! Day after weary day, to sit there watching the sheep—with naught save my own thoughts for company. [*Turning again to ZORI.*] Wherefore should I be joyful? Hath not our father bound me to the master for seven long years of service? Seven years!

ZORI. Yet thou might have fared worse. The master hath been generous. He hath not taken thee from our father's house. Here art thou still free to come and go.

TILON. Free! *Thou* art free. From early dawn till setting sun thou doest what thou will while I serve my master. And this night of all others when I would go to mingle with the crowds I needs must keep watch again for our kinsman. *Free!* [*He crosses again and drops upon bench before fire.*]

ZORI. Crowds? What crowds? Tell me, Tilon.

TILON [*waxing enthusiastic*]. Why, hast thou not heard? Bethlehem overflows with people. From every quarter they flock here to pay the tax imposed by Cæsar. They say the streets are filled with caravans. And there hath been singing and feasting and merrymaking these many days. Soon the people will return to their homes and

I—I shall still tend the sheep and behold none of it. And thou sayest I am free.

ZORI. Nay, Tilon, speak not so bitterly. I meant no harm. [*He goes to grate, takes basket in his arm, and kneels near TILON.*] Tilon, wilt thou not look at me? Thou knowest I would gladly keep the watch for thee. Ah, my brother, thou art straight and tall as the cedar tree, and thy face is as brown as the earth. How often have I watched thee from the window there—running so freely to overtake thy companions—thy head thrown back, and the wind blowing through thy hair; and then have I longed with all my heart to be as thou art—but Jehovah hath not suffered it to be so. Else would I watch the sheep for thee tonight.

TILON [*half ashamed*]. Ay. I know thou wouldst. Thou art a good lad, Zori! How doeth thy little gray lamb?

ZORI [*happy again*]. Look, Tilon! [*Holds up basket.*] Hath he not grown? Soon I shall need a larger basket for him. Today I fed him nearly half my bowl of milk. And, Tilon, doth it not seem to thee that his fleece groweth whiter?

TILON [*looking at it hastily and rising to cross to window*]. Ay, no doubt. [*Looks out of window intently.*]

ZORI [*rising, leaving basket at hearth*]. What dost thou see?



SOON I SHALL NEED A LARGER BASKET FOR HIM

TILON [*gloomy again*]. The night is so clear I can see once and again the flare from the torches in the village. No doubt there is a procession, with music and dancing. . . .

ZORI. But our father cometh. [*He goes toward door as it opens. JACOB enters. He carries a lighted lantern.*] Oh, my father, how doeth our kinsman?

JACOB. The fever hath left him, and though he is still weak, he will recover. Jehovah be thanked.

ZORI. And our kinswoman Sarah. Hath she remembered her promise?

JACOB. Her promise?

ZORI. The fine piece of wood she hath promised to me.

JACOB. She hath not forgotten thee, but we spoke of other things and I brought it not with me. Tomorrow I will fetch it thee. Meantime she hath made some little cakes which she will bring to thee, for her sister Anna hath come to sit a time at our kinsman's bedside.

ZORI [*disappointed but brave*]. And Sarah will bring the cakes tonight, my father?

JACOB. Ay, tonight.

ZORI [*hopefully*]. Oh, then it may be she will bring the wood to me also.

JACOB [*fondly*]. And thou hadst rather have thy bit of wood, I am thinking, than the cakes.

ZORI [*softly*]. Thou sayest, my father.

JACOB [*more sternly*]. And yet thou must eat, my son. Thou hast need of food to give thee strength. [*Crosses down right, musing.*]

ZORI [*in center*]. Dost thou believe I shall some day grow as tall as thou art, my father? And as strong and brown as my brother Tilon?

JACOB [*quietly*]. Jehovah knoweth best. [*To TILON, who has stayed at the window.*] Come—it groweth late—we must be on our way. [*Comes to ZORI in center and places hand on his head.*] God be with thee, my son.

ZORI. And with thee, my father. [*JACOB goes out, and TILON, who has crossed to take his sheepskin from the floor, follows to door without a word. The room is quite dark.*] And Tilon—my brother, may Jehovah comfort thee in thy loneliness. [*As he speaks he looks about the room wistfully, and his voice has a strange note which causes TILON to turn back to him in wonder.*]

TILON [*curiously*]. Art *thou* lonely? Thou?

ZORI. Nay, nay, I know not what it is, and yet . . . [*Halloo is heard from the distance.*] Go, Tilon. Our father calls thee. [*Gives lantern to TILON.*]

TILON. Ay. Farewell then.

ZORI. Farewell, my brother. [*He stands for a moment in the doorway, watching the disappearing figure of his brother; then closes the door, comes to hearth, takes lamb in arms, and crosses to window, where he stands looking*

out wistfully. The lamb stirs restlessly in the basket.]
There, there, my little one. Rest, rest. What though thy
fleece be gray while thy brothers have coats that are white



as snow? What though thy feet will not bear thee up while
thy sisters frisk in the dewy pastures? I love thee, my little
one—my little gray one. Though all the snow-white lambs
of our master's flock were offered me, I would not give
thee in exchange. Thou art all my flock, and I am thy

keeper. [*He gazes up again at the sky. Again the lamb stirs.*] Nay, stir not. See—the stars come out and shine down upon us. The pastures are clothed with flocks and the valleys are covered with corn. And over it all, God sendeth this strange sweet silence down. [*He stands again, with his face lifted to the stars. The stillness becomes acute. A knock comes at the door, but he does not hear it. It is repeated, louder this time, and followed by a woman's voice.*]

SARAH [*the woman*]. Zori, Zori! [*He is startled back to reality and turns from the window in confusion.*] Zori! It is I—Sarah. Art thou within?

ZORI [*goes eagerly to door and opens it*]. Ay, Sarah. I come. [*SARAH enters with cakes in a napkin and in the other hand a lantern and the piece of wood. She crosses to the table, where she puts down her burdens, looking about as if in fear.*] Sarah, I am glad thou art come . . . but what is it? Why art thou frightened?

SARAH. Thou didst not answer me—and as I stood there—everything so still—a fear crept upon me. It—it is so still. Hast thou felt nothing?

ZORI. Ay, a strange sweet something—yet I do not fear. Oh, Sarah, I know not what it is, but I think God is very near to us tonight.

SARAH. What dost thou mean?

ZORI. Nay—I have told thee I know not what it is—

but here in my breast it is as if a bird had wakened to sing a strange new song, and then folded its wings in peace as deep—as deep as—oh, Sarah, dost thou not feel it? Come to the window. [*He goes again to the window, his voice quivering with ecstasy. She follows, fascinated and half fearful.*] See! Not a leaf stirs. The trees lift their arms to the stars and wait—and wait. . . . All things are still, but again and yet again out of the stillness comes the echo of that song, thrilling with gladness and light. Verily God and His blessed angels bend low to touch the earth tonight.

SARAH. Hush! God is in the Heaven of Heavens, and we are a sinful people. I am sore afraid.

ZORI. Nay, do not fear. No harm can come to us. [*Coming toward her, sees wood on table.*] Why, Sarah, thou hast brought the wood for me.

SARAH. Ay, and some cakes. They were baking when thy father came.

ZORI. Come, we will sit by the fire. See. I will place my lamb here and I will sit at thy feet and begin the carving while thou dost tell me again the story of the King that is to come. [*He places the lamb by the hearth and draws the bench closer to the fire. SARAH has gone to the window and is looking out uneasily. He goes for the piece of wood.*] There! Now all is ready. Sarah, what dost thou see?

SARAH. Nothing—nothing—and yet— [*Passes her hand*

wearily across her head.] Nay, it is nothing. I am tired with long watching at the bedside. I will sit by the fire where it is warm and tell thee thy story, though I wonder that thou dost never weary of it. [*She seats herself upon the bench, and ZORI sits at her feet. He takes a small knife from a pouch hanging from his girdle and begins to carve.*]

ZORI. Nay, nay. I shall never weary of it—yet I long for the time when He shall come. Sarah, dost thou think we shall ever see the King—the Promised One of God?

SARAH. I know not. There be many sinful ones among us. And yet it was of Bethlehem that the prophet spake—Bethlehem, the City of David. Zori, here in these very pastures where Tilon and thy father watch the flocks to-night, David fed his father's lambs.

ZORI [*dreamily, and laying down his work*]. Ay, David the King.

SARAH. And from the house of David, saith the prophet, shall come forth the Messiah, the King of all the earth, the Son of God. And He shall reign forever. He shall strengthen the weak and bless the strong.

ZORI [*his head resting against her knee, his face turned upward; speaking as if from memory*]. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd. He shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom. . . .

SARAH. There shall be no more death, nor any sorrow. . . .

ZORI. The mountains and hills shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. . . .



SARAH. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God. . . .

ZORI. The everlasting father and the Prince of Peace.
[As he speaks, a glow begins to come in at the window and gradually floods the entire room with light.]

SARAH. Zori, Zori, what is it? I am afraid! [*She springs to her feet, gazing about in terror as if to hide from the light. He takes his lamb and stumbles to his feet and goes to her.*]

ZORI. I—I cannot see. The light—it is so bright it dazzles me. [*The sound of angel voices far in distance is heard.*] Sarah, Sarah, dost thou hear? [*In awed whisper. —They stand motionless until the song ends and the glow begins to fade. TILON's voice is heard from without trembling with excitement. The door is flung open and he rushes in.*]

TILON. Zori, Zori—and thou, Sarah! Hast thou seen? Hast thou heard?

ZORI and SARAH. Ay. The light, and the singing. What is it? What has happened? The sky seemed all aflame.

TILON. I was lying there with the others, my staff beside me. A few of the sheep had strayed away from the flock and as it was my turn to make the round, I started up the hill after them when suddenly the sky began to glow as if it were dawn. I called to the others and they came running up and then—I know not how to tell it—there came such a silence that we fell upon our faces in fear—but even as we did so a voice sounded in our midst saying: “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. Unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord.”

ZORI [*crying out in exultation*]. Sarah, Sarah! The King . . . the King of all the earth. He is come . . . in Bethlehem . . . in Bethlehem!

SARAH [*raising her arms in thanksgiving*]. Jehovah!

TILON. Then, while we still knelt there, the air was filled with angel voices. And there in our midst stood the Angel of the Lord. "This," he said, "shall be a sign to you. Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." There was another blinding flash of light, and when we could see again, he was gone!

ZORI. Tilon, doth any seek Him, the little King?

TILON. Ay. The others are already upon their way, and I would be with them but that our father, who tendeth the flocks, bade me hurry hither to tell thee what had happened lest thou shouldst die of fright here alone. And the others carry fragrant herbs and a goatskin of sweet milk as gifts. I must hasten to overtake them—yet I would I had some gift to bear. [*Starts out.*]

ZORI. Tilon, wait! See, thou shalt have a gift. I will give thee my little lamb. [*He offers it willingly, though the sacrifice is great, as his face plainly shows.*]

TILON. What! Carry an ugly gray, crippled lamb—the poorest of the whole flock—as my gift to a king? Nay, I want it not. [*Starts again.*]

SARAH. The cakes, then, Tilon. Take the cakes.

TILON. Cakes?

SARAH. Ay, here in this napkin. [*Giving them to him.*] They are still warm.

TILON. Ah, that is a gift worth taking. Sarah, I thank thee. Now I must hasten after the others. [*He hurries out. ZORI stands looking after him wistfully, while SARAH, excited and not noticing his disappointment, prepares to leave.*]

SARAH. Now are the prophet's words fulfilled. Jehovah hath sent the Messiah, the Promised One. And to Bethlehem! But why do I linger here? I must return to my husband and my sister with the tidings. Thou dost not fear to be alone, Zori?

ZORI. Nay, I fear not.

SARAH. God be with thee then. [*She kisses him fondly and hurries out. ZORI is left alone. He fondles the lamb and then speaks yearningly.*]

ZORI. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings. Jehovah, thou seest me—a little child, who may not tread the starlit way to Bethlehem to worship the newborn King; yet would I give to Him that which is most dear to me—my little lamb. [*While he is speaking the song of the WISE MEN is heard in the distance, drawing nearer—"We three kings of Orient are," etc. Suddenly padding footsteps are heard and then a knock at the door.*] Who art thou?

OMAD [*entering*]. I am Omad, slave of Balthazar the

Wise man. I seek tidings. What town is that which lieth in the valley there below?

ZORI. Sir, that is Bethlehem of Judea, the City of David. Go you there tonight?

OMAD. Three mighty Wise Men from the East do I lead there to worship the great King. For they have seen His star in the east, and come to do Him honor.

ZORI. Oh, then wilt thou carry this lamb for me and place it at the feet of the newborn King? For thou seest I am lame and cannot walk in the rough places. [*Comes eagerly to him with lamb.*]

OMAD [*looking at it.*] Nay, surely thou wilt not send so poor a gift! Thy lamb is gray and ugly.

ZORI [*humbly*]. Sir, it is all I have—and it is very dear to me. And I think its fleece will grow more white. Will you not take it for me?

OMAD. Nay, my masters would not suffer me to bear so poor a gift. Why, look you, they bring gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh—rich jewels and costly fabrics. Never have I seen such an array of gifts. The camels are heavy laden with the finest offerings of the whole world. Of what value is thy poor gift? Nay, keep thy ugly little lamb. It is no gift for a king. What saidst thou was the name of the town toward which we travel?

ZORI. It is called Bethlehem of Judea.

OMAD. Bethlehem. I shall remember. And I thank thee. Peace be unto thee.

ZORI. And to thee. [OMAD goes out.] Bethlehem! [*He goes to the window and looks out longingly toward the town.*] Bethlehem, the City of David—David the King. And here in these pastures David did tend his father's lambs. [*He kneels suddenly, setting his crutch against the wall.*] Jehovah—God of our fathers, look down and hear Thy little one. My feet are as lead and fetter me here, while from near and far men come with gifts, to worship the King. The wealth of all the world they lay at His feet there in Bethlehem and here, beneath Thy everlasting stars, I too lay down my gifts before Him—this little lamb, and all my heart of love. [*A round spot of light as if it were the halo about the head of an angel appears in the door and from the place where the light shines comes the voice of the Angel.*]

ANGEL. Verily thy gift is more precious than all these others. Rise and follow me. For thou shalt place thy lamb as a gift of love at the feet of the Saviour. [ZORI rises as in a trance and reaches from habit for his crutch.] Nay, I will be thy staff. [*The light travels toward him, lighting his face that is radiant with joy.*] Stretch out thy hand and place it here in mine. [ZORI looks up as if into the face of the angel and then with perfect confidence places his hand in the invisible hand of the angel. The lamb is still

held close to his breast, as the light leads him across the room and out into the night. The stage is left in complete darkness. The curtains come slowly together.]

SCENE II

The yard before the stable of the inn at Bethlehem. A simple curtain is hung at the back to shield the manger and the holy family. Before the curtains, at the right, are the SHEPHERDS. With them is the INN SERVANT, who has just led them to this place.

SERVANT. This is the place—the stable of my master's inn. If what ye say be true, then here with beasts should the child be found.

FIRST SHEPHERD. Sir, we be humble folk and not used to the ways of the town, but I pray thou wilt accept our thanks and suffer us to remain here.

SERVANT [*wonderingly*]. Dost thou still believe thy King is here? Here in a stable?

TILON. It all happened even as we have told thee. The sky was filled with an unearthly glow that frightened us so that we fell upon our faces in fear. I wonder that ye saw it not here. The heavens seemed all aflame.

SERVANT. Ye are shepherds with naught to do but lie upon your backs in the pastures watching the sheep. I think ye slept and dreamed this thing.

SECOND SHEPHERD. Nay. It was no dream.

SERVANT [*incredulous*]. And ye say an angel appeared and spake with thee?

THIRD SHEPHERD. He came and stood in our midst. He said, "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy . . . for unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord."

SERVANT. Yet why think ye to find the infant here? Think ye so great a one should be housed in the stable? Is it not more likely that ye shall find him at the inn?

TILON. Nay. For 'twas thus the angel spake: "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

SERVANT [*shaking his head, puzzled*]. Well, I know not. But this I know: there was a man who came this morn seeking a place to stay at the inn. My master, the inn-keeper, told him that there was no room and he went away; but he came again and asked for a place in the stable, for his wife was wearied from the long journey from Nazareth. My master who is ever kindly disposed to any from Nazareth—for it was the city of his birth—gave him leave to find shelter here, and bade me make beds of clean new straw. And there within did I make them. But this man was a carpenter, he said. And Joseph was his name. [*Enter JOSEPH from within the curtain.*]

JOSEPH. Who seeketh Joseph of Nazareth? For I am he.

SERVANT. Sir, these be shepherds who have come seeking one whom they call the Saviour. If thou knowest aught of Him I pray thou wilt speak with them for I must return. [*Exit the SERVANT, left.*]

JOSEPH. Whom dost thou seek?

FIRST SHEPHERD. Sir, we come by direction of the angel, who appeared to us this night while we watched our flocks, to find the infant Saviour.

JOSEPH [*in simple acceptance of their statement*]. "Mary thy wife shall bear a son, and His name shall be called Jesus—for He shall save His people from their sins." Thus spake the angel of the Lord which appeared to me in a dream. And thus hath it come to pass, for there within the child lies sleeping.

FIRST SHEPHERD. Then would we bow down and worship Him, for surely this is He whom we seek.

TILON. Ay, and place our gifts before Him.

JOSEPH. Then tarry here and it shall be as ye have said. [*He goes within and draws aside the curtains, revealing MARY, her face radiant with the light from the manger over which she bends tenderly. The SHEPHERDS kneel in awe, two at either side, and lay down their gifts. JOSEPH stands at the back, watching. While the SHEPHERDS worship, the song of the WISE MEN is heard in the distance. It*

comes nearer and nearer, and JOSEPH, seeing them, speaks to MARY in amazement.] Mary, see. While shepherds kneel before the babe, kings do come to worship Him.

MARY [*lifting her eyes to Heaven*]. He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. Rest, my little one, rest. [*The WISE MEN enter and together come to the center, kneel, touching their heads to the ground, and present their gifts, each as he speaks holding a gift up before him, and then bowing his head again to the ground.*]

MELCHIOR.

We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star.

CASPAR.

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.

BALTHAZAR.

Frankincense to offer have I,
Incense owns a Deity nigh.
Prayer and praising, all men raising,
Worship Him, God most high.

[*As they finish, they rise and start out (left), speaking as they go.*]

MELCHIOR. His praise shall be upon my lips forever.

CASPAR. His wisdom shall rule the world.

BALTHAZAR. His glory will we proclaim to all men.

[*The WISE MEN go off, followed by the wondering SHEPHERDS.*]

FIRST SHEPHERD. And we too shall tell the wonder of this night to all we meet upon the way. [*Exeunt the SHEPHERDS, left.*]

MARY [*her eyes looking before her as if she saw far into the future*]. Ah, Jesus, my little one, the sent of God—gold have they brought Thee and worship, and awe. The great ones of the earth bow down before Thee; the lowly and simple folk do place their offerings at Thy feet; yet I, thy mother do covet for Thee a gift that is greater than these. . . . [*She bends closer above the manger, both arms encircling the Babe, her eyes looking into the distance.*] For the gold and the glory, they shall pass away . . .

JOSEPH [*kneeling at the feet of the Babe, and laying his hand gently upon the VIRGIN's arm*]. Mary, thine eyes are fixed as upon another world. What dost thou ponder in thy heart? [*She seems not to hear him, her eyes still searching the misty future as if she would pluck from it the gift she knows to be the greatest of all.*] Blessed art thou among women. For thou hast given a light to them

that sit in darkness, and all the earth shall praise Him. Lo, even now, another cometh. [*ZORI enters from right, the*



lamb in his arms. He comes slowly as if drawn by some invisible force, his eyes never leaving the face of the VIRGIN.]

ZORI [*kneeling*]. Oh, Jesus, Son of God, here at Thy feet do I kneel and offer Thee all that I have . . . this little lamb, and all my heart of love. [*He places the lamb before him, and with his hands folded as in prayer, bows his head.*]

MARY [*divinely radiant*]. The gift of love! Now doth my spirit rejoice. My soul doth magnify the Lord, for He hath done to me great things, and holy is His name! [*Her words are taken up by an invisible angel choir and swell into a mighty anthem of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."*]

CURTAIN



NOTES FOR PRODUCTION

1. Although the play is written in two scenes, it may be effectively produced by the use of one set. The walls of the stage to be covered with curtains of plain gray material hung in soft folds. About halfway back, curtains of the same material to be hung across the stage from left to right to form the back wall of the shepherds' cot. The curtains should be arranged so that at the proper moment they can be drawn apart to reveal the manger.
2. For angel chorus in first scene, hum the choral Sanctus, "Holy, Holy, Holy," from A. R. Gaul's sacred cantata, "The Holy City." For the angel chorus at the end, use the same song with full chorus and organ if possible.
3. For the song of the Wise Men, use "We Three Kings of Orient Are," by J. H. Hopkins.





